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JACKSON, MISS. – The [Forum of State Nursing Workforce Centers](#), a national group of 33 nurse workforce organizations, is pleased to announce the ratification of national minimum datasets in the areas of nursing supply, nursing demand, and nursing education programs. "This consensus building process has been under development for more than a year. Identifying and working toward meaningful and sustainable solutions to the long- and short-term nursing shortages is an issue that requires input and collaboration from a variety of partners, including nursing practice and education, along with government, economic development, workforce development, philanthropy and the business community," according to Wanda Jones, PhD(c) RN, 2009 Forum steering committee chair and executive director of the Mississippi Office of Nursing Workforce. "With the increased national emphasis on health care reform, the need for accurate and standardized state and national-level nursing workforce forecasts is even more critical. The first step of reaching consensus on what data need to be collected has already been achieved through the Forum's grassroots process," says Jones. Washington State is a member of the Forum. Linda Tieman, the Executive Director for the Washington Center for Nursing, is on the Steering Committee for the National Forum.

Mary Lou Brunell, past chair of the Forum's steering committee and executive director of the Florida Center for Nursing, recalls "As several of us became more involved in establishing workforce centers in the states and looked nationally at what we knew about the nursing workforce, it became evident that we needed to know much more in terms of nursing demand and the capacity of our educational programs to produce nurses to meet current and future needs." At the time, a recommended minimum dataset already existed for nursing supply, courtesy of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Colleagues in Caring program, which was funded from 1994-2003.

According to Dr. Jennifer Nooney, chairperson of the Forum's research interest group and associate director for research at the Florida Center for Nursing, "The National Forum realized in June 2008 that we needed to standardize the data elements that are being collected. In addition to nurse supply information, which is what Colleagues in Caring tackled, information is also essential for nurse demand—from employers such as hospitals, nursing homes, public health, and home health agencies—and from nursing education programs, since their output of new graduates indicates the size and characteristics of our future nurse supply."

In order to develop the three data sets, the Forum's committee members – all of whom were volunteers – began a rigorous process of consensus building with support from the Center to Champion Nursing in America, an initiative of AARP. The first step was to establish a research group with representation from all subscriber states and then to assess nursing data elements customarily collected by each state, along with the value or weight of these data elements in terms of state and national efforts. Nooney adds, "The first question we asked was 'what is everybody currently collecting?' When we got responses back from the survey it became really clear which items were most important for our work."

Forum committee members organized their work into three groups of members, each charged with drafting a minimum nursing dataset for supply, demand, and education. This culminated in a data summit, held in March 2009 in Biloxi, Miss. Representatives from 23 states who attended the data summit reviewed the drafts in detail and discussed the pros and cons of different measurement approaches.

The Forum then conducted a public comment period, soliciting input from experts and representatives from national organizations, both public and private. This input was used to revise the datasets once again, and to submit the drafts to each of the states that subscribe to the Forum. By a process of voting, the Forum ratified the collaboratively-created datasets in September 2009.

The Forum Steering Committee is interested in collaborating with other national groups and organizations interested in supporting, funding, and participating in the process as it moves forward.

"Information is power," states Brunell. "Really, that's the key point. We need to be able to provide accurate, comprehensive information to the policymakers and those who are in decision making positions, so that policy and decisions are based on reliable and valid information."

"The minimum dataset is one example of the importance and value of the collaboration and input we received on this important project from Forum members across the United States," says Jones. "We know having standardized minimum data sets for nursing will be tremendously beneficial to state and national efforts which are focused on creating the right number of appropriately prepared nurses on a short and long-term basis."

Established in 2002, the Forum's goals are to assure the availability of standardized core nursing supply and demand data sets; achieve consensus on the key elements needed to forecast nursing supply and demand; promote dynamic and strategically driven processes for nursing workforce long-range planning; disseminate successful practices related to contemporary nursing workforce issues; share resources related to creating and sustaining statewide nursing workforce entities; and, provide a collective force for developing and disseminating state nursing workforce policy initiatives. For more information about the Forum of State Nursing Workforce Centers, or its 2010 annual meeting, set for June 9-10, visit www.NursingWorkforceCenters.org.