NURSES PLAY PIVOTAL ROLE IN ADVANCING HEALTH CARE
National and State Goals, Best Practices are Focus of Workforce Summit

Nurses are the largest workforce in America and are playing a pivotal role in advancing health care and improving patient care nationwide and in the Commonwealth. That message was highlighted repeatedly at the recent Massachusetts Healthcare Workforce Summit, attended by approximately 150 nurse leaders, educators, nurses, and health care employers from around the state.

The October 2, 2014 event was organized by the Massachusetts Action Coalition (MAAC), a partnership of the MA Dept. of Higher Education and the Organization of Nurse Leaders of MA & RI, which is leading a statewide campaign to transform health care through nursing education and practice innovations.

“Today's focus is on the nursing workforce, but the role of nursing in advancing health reform expands beyond workforce development,” noted Patricia Crombie, MSN, RN, MAAC Project Director. “We must engage the larger community, so that everyone understands the important role nurses play in improving the health of all residents and employees.”

Mary Dickow, MPA, Statewide Director of the California Action Coalition, gave a national overview of states’ efforts to implement the recommendations of the Institute of Medicine’s (IOM) 2010 landmark report, The Future of Nursing.

“We have amazingly rich evidence of what nurses can do to advance and improve health care in this country,” said Dickow. “Even as states find different ways to advance the IOM recommendations, it’s important that the 3.7 million nurses nationwide speak powerfully with single voice.”

According to Dickow, lack of reliable data is a challenge for many states. “We have a goal of doubling the number of nurses with doctoral degrees or increasing the number of nurses who serve on boards of directors, but in many cases we don’t have a solid baseline.”

Dickow lauded Massachusetts’ creation of a toolkit to help nurse education programs and practice settings implement the Massachusetts Nurse of the Future Nursing Core Competencies, which she said “builds shared excellence” and serves as a foundation for nursing academic progression at all levels.

While Massachusetts is working statewide on academic progression, California is taking a regional approach, explained Dickow. “We have 11 million people in Los Angeles and more nursing schools in LA county than in many states. Working across states and learning from each other sparks our creativity and helps all of us advance this important work.”

Only nine states, including Massachusetts, have been recognized by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) for their efforts to create a more highly educated, diverse
nursing workforce by making it easier for current and future nurses to earn a bachelor’s degree or higher. Bryan Hoffman, Program Manager of RWJF’s Academic Progression in Nursing initiative, told summit participants that “we’ll need a piece of all of each of these initiatives – and more – in order to succeed.”

In addition to keynote addresses by Dickow and Hoffman, the summit included overviews of MAAC goals to advance nursing and provided examples of best practices now underway in Massachusetts. Participants shared insights, ideas, and promising solutions during lively break-out sessions. Topics and best practice examples included:

**Increasing Diversity of Nursing Workforce**

The call to increase the diversity of the nursing workforce in MA was clear. “Our workforce must become more racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse in order to meet the needs of the U.S. population as it grows to over 50% non-white by 2050,” said Gloria Cater, PhD, FNP-BC, FNAP, Dean Emerita, Roxbury Community College. “Studies show that bias by health care providers has a detrimental impact on the health care of patients. With a more diverse nursing workforce, we can help change that reality and improve patient care.”

Ladonna Christian, RN, MSN, APHN-BC, Associate Professor of Practice-Nursing at Simmons College, outlined the school’s successful Dotson Bridge and Mentoring Program which has proven very successful in increasing the academic achievement of students of color and increasing the number of students of color within its nurse education program. Partnerships with practice settings and public high schools include mentoring, leadership training, and career development.

**Increase Academic Progression to BSN and higher**

“Studies show that a more highly educated and diverse nursing workforce positively impacts patient outcomes,” Janet Lusk Monagle, PhD, RN, CNE, Director of Academic Affairs, Lawrence Memorial/Regis College Nursing Program, told summit participants. “While recent graduates understand the value of a BSN, working nurses, LPNs and RNs, often don't have encouragement from peers or employers to continue their education. Forty-two percent (42%) of working nurses here in Massachusetts don't feel there's value in earning a BSN; that’s a challenge for all of us.”

A promising program for LPN-to-BSN progression is underway at Fitchburg State University and Worcester State University, reported Linda McKay, RN, MS, Chair, Department of Nursing at Fitchburg. “Partnership, collaborative planning, and cooperation at all levels – faculty, admissions offices, employers – are keys to success,” said McKay, who noted that each university has increased the number of LPN-BSN nursing graduates by 15 students each year.

In western Mass., a partnership between Berkshire Health Systems and Elms College has increased the number of BSN-prepared nurses at Berkshire Health from 28% to nearly 50% over five years. “I see the difference this is making for Berkshire Health and for our patients,” said Brenda Cadorette, MSN, Chief Nurse Executive of Acute Care Services. “Our nurses are more engaged in improving the quality of care and are leading change in our institution today.”

**Nurse of the Future Core Competencies**

The creation and dissemination of a shared set of core competencies [Nurse of the Future Nursing Core Competencies©, NOFNCC] has laid the foundation for academic progression in nursing at all levels in Massachusetts, said Judy Beal, DNSc, RN, FNAP, FAAN, Nursing Dean, Simmons College. “Our surveys indicate that there’s greater use of the NOFNCC in
academic settings than in practice settings, so that’s an important challenge for us. Strong academic-practice partnerships are key to the successful implementation of the core competencies.”

At the Boston VA Hospital, the NOFNCC have been incorporated into the post-baccalaureate nurse residency program, according to Ceci McVey, RN, BSN, MHA, Associate Director for Nursing/Patient Care Program at VA Boston Healthcare Systems. “Additionally, we are using the implementation toolkit to weave the competencies into our ongoing staff development programs for other staff nurses, residents, and managers.”

Increase Pool of Faculty to Educate Nurses for BSN and Beyond

If Massachusetts is to reach its goal of 66% BSN-prepared nurses by 2020, it must increase the number of qualified nursing faculty through recruitment, retention, and professional development, said Karen Manning, RN, MSN, CRRN, CHPN, Chair of Nursing Program, Westfield State University. Projecting faculty needs, developing innovative strategies for retaining and recruiting faculty, and developing an online Faculty Development Center of Excellence are top priorities.

Kimberly Silver DNP, RN, at UMass Graduate School of Nursing told summit participants of a recent and promising pilot project: a free, online Clinical Faculty Development Program. Given the success of the online project, plans are underway to consider offering the continuing education training in workshop settings, perhaps in conjunction with several other nursing schools.

Expand Scope of Practice for Advanced Practice RNs (APRN)

While Massachusetts has led the nation’s health reform initiatives, the laws and regulations that govern how some of the state’s most highly trained nurses are authorized to practice remain among the most restrictive in the nation, Stephanie Ahmed, DNP, FNP-BC, DPNAP, of the Mass. Coalition of Nurse Practitioners told summit participants. “Advances in the standardization of APRN education and a wealth of peer-reviewed data support independent practice for APRNs.”

In Rhode Island, CVS MinuteClinic provide an example of APRN best practices, with Family Nurse Practitioners and Physician Assistants providing high-quality care in a convenient, affordable manner. Angela Patterson, MSN, FNP-BC, Chief Nurse Practitioner Officer for MinuteClinic, reported that the program scores high in measures of quality care and patient satisfaction and is a good example of how advanced practice nurses can have a significant impact on improving access to high quality health care.

Copies of the Summit presentations and more information on the Massachusetts Action Coalition are available online at http://campaignforaction.org/state/massachusetts or by contacting Pat Crombie at pmcrombie@gmail.com.