Time to Go Back to School?
Massachusetts Action Coalition Works to Improve
Academic Progression in Nursing

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The long-running conversation about academic preparation level of nurses was reinvigorated with the release of the Institute of Medicine (IOM) report, The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health (2010). Right now, approximately 55% of Massachusetts’ nursing workforce holds a BS/N degree or higher. “This is a good starting place, but we have a lot of work to do to get to the recommended level of 80%,” notes Patricia Crombie, MSN, RN, Project Director of Massachusetts Action Coalition (MAAC).

In response, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and AARP established Action Coalitions in all 50 states that will advance the IOM’s recommendations. Massachusetts was one of nine states to receive an APIN (Academic Progression In Nursing) grant to identify best practices for academic progression of nurses. The work focuses on building capacity in RN to BS/N programs, identifying educational pathways for nurses initially prepared at the ADN level, and simplifying the transfer of credits into BSN programs through a Nursing Education Transfer Compact.

“Ultimately, the goal is to ensure that our education system promotes and supports seamless academic progression for all nurses,” said David Cedrone, an Associate Commissioner at the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education.

The IOM’s recommendations align with a growing body of research that supports the value of baccalaureate nursing education for patients and employers. Two significant contributions to this body of evidence include the work of Linda Aiken, PhD, RN, FAAN, and colleagues, who in 2003 reported a significant decrease in surgical patient mortality in hospitals employing more staff nurses prepared at a baccalaureate level. In 2013, Aiken and colleagues reported that within a hospital, a ten percent increase in the number of nurses with baccalaureate preparation translated into a reduction of 2.12 deaths per 1000 patients. Building on these findings, Blegen et al (2013) reported that hospitals with higher percentages of BSN or higher nurses had a positive impact on nurse-sensitive outcomes other than mortality. Consequently, nurse leaders are recognizing the value of having a higher ratio of baccalaureate prepared nurses at the bedside, and incorporating that into their hiring practices and strategic planning. This was validated in Massachusetts through a recent employer survey conducted by MAAC.

Nurses must be prepared to meet diverse patient needs, function as leaders, and deliver safe, high-quality patient care. This becomes even more critical as people are living longer in vulnerable states of health and are cared for with new approaches in a variety of settings. “The range of skills required in today’s healthcare environment require the breadth and depth of preparation of BS/N programs,” says Sharon Gale. “Our goal is to encourage nurses to set their sights on attaining higher levels of education and committing to lifelong learning. We need to inform students about educational pathways available to them, and to foster academic progression at all levels within the profession.” For more information on the Massachusetts Action Coalition or the work being done to advance the objectives in the Future of Nursing Report, please visit the following sites:

Center to Champion Nursing in America: 
http://campaignforaction.org/

Massachusetts Department of Higher Education: 
http://www.mass.edu/nursing

Organization of Nurse Leaders Ma/RI at: 
www.OONL.org

References:

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