

**PROGRESS REPORT
STATE PLAN FOR NURSING EDUCATION**

**TO THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND LONG-TERM CARE
AND
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH CARE**

As Required by Chapter 9 (Section 713) Washington Laws, 1989, First Executive Session

December 1, 1989

BACKGROUND

Legislative

In 1989, Senate Bill 6152 was adopted by the Legislature creating the Department of Health. The bill incorporated three areas of health legislation that directly affect higher education.

The first activity directed by this legislation required the Higher Education Coordinating Board to develop a plan for increasing rural training opportunities for students pursuing degrees in medicine, nursing and physician assistant education at state-supported institutions of higher education. The language requiring this plan was ultimately vetoed by the Governor.

The second activity was the establishment of the Health Professional Loan Repayment Program, directing the Higher Education Coordinating Board to administer the program and be responsible for repayment of loans. This program has been established and will be operational effective Fall, 1990.

The third activity, the subject of this report, requires the Higher Education Coordinating Board, in consultation with various agencies, institutions, and organizations to develop a state plan for nursing education. This focus on nursing education reflects legislative concern about the current national and state nursing shortage, and the purpose of the plan is to identify strategies for addressing and alleviating that shortage. Specifically, the legislature is concerned that nursing students may be having difficulty in educational mobility and that nursing education programs are not adequately available in several areas of the state.

In developing this report, Board staff interviewed legislative and agency staff, hospital and nursing association staff, and nursing educators. The interviews have helped to identify the issues. Professional journals, congressional hearing transcripts and several

national reports have also provided the national perspective in which to develop a state plan.

The statutory language is explicit, requiring a progress report to the standing legislative committees on health care by December 1, 1989, a final plan to be delivered by December 1, 1990, and an implementation date of January 1, 1992. The inclusion of an implementation date clearly conveys the legislative expectation that the Higher Education Coordinating Board will forward recommendations to address the issues cited in the act.

Preceding Study

In the 1987 legislative session, Substitute House Bill 1404 directed the Board of Nursing to "conduct a study that investigates the scope of all nursing education programs in the state, to develop a model for articulation of the education program for career mobility and for support for innovative nursing education programs."¹ The Board of Nursing was to report its findings to the Legislature by January 1, 1989. The draft of that report discussed the nursing education system in Washington, and the relative accessibility and mobility among the programs spanning different licensure goals and educational degrees. It provided information on two articulation models, but noted that neither was sufficiently comprehensive to address the issues of educational mobility from the nursing assistant level extending through doctoral programs. Although the report was not finalized, the draft report contained an outline of assumptions as a foundation for a comprehensive articulation model and further provided several recommendations for future study.

The state plan required of the Higher Education Coordinating Board focused on educational planning and coordination as opposed to a study of human resource needs,

¹Washington State Legislature, Final Legislative Report, 1987 Second and Third Special and 1988 Regular and First Special Sessions (Olympia: 1988) p. 41.

although the documented nursing shortage is a major impetus for the Legislature to call for the development of the plan. The HECB plan will discuss the structure of nursing education programs in Washington, and assess and articulate the current educational process between and among the various programs. The plan will also address the issues contained in the statute as well as other related higher education issues as appropriate, and identify alternative strategies to strengthen nursing education.

STATE PLAN COMPONENTS IDENTIFIED IN STATUTE

The statute (Appendix A) requires that the plan shall provide for:

(A) Geographic Availability

The plan will address the geographic availability of nursing education and training programs. The Board has previously engaged in an extensive study of general educational access to both urban and rural areas of the state, resulting in a series of recommendations for urban branch campuses in Building a System. The Washington State Master Plan for Higher Education. As stated in the Master Plan, "Expanding service to residents for rural areas presents a difficult challenge."² However, expansion of programs in nursing education in rural areas is to be considered as a part of this project. The need to ensure quality health care to all citizens of the state will need to be discussed in the context of efficient alternative delivery systems of nursing education.

(B) Curriculum Standards

The plan will address the curriculum standards for each type of nursing education and training program. Nursing is one of the few professions that provides multiple entry points to practice. Nursing education is unique in its preparation of nursing assistants by non-collegiate health care providers, high schools, secondary skill centers, vocational-technical institutes, and community colleges; preparation for licensure in practical nursing at both vocational-technical institutes and community colleges; and preparation for licensure in registered nursing at community colleges (Associate Degree in Nursing) and

²Washington State, Higher Education Coordinating Board, Building A System/The Washington State Master Plan for Higher Education (Olympia: 1987) p. 16.

public and private four-year colleges and universities (Bachelor of Science in Nursing). While these programs may differ in focus and emphasis in order to meet the needs of the health care systems in their service areas, such flexibility is consistent with a requirement for a body of knowledge acquired through prerequisites and core subject areas that ensure public confidence and facilitate mobility of nurses to higher levels of practice.

(C) Transfer of Credit

The plan will address the procedures to facilitate optimal transfer or granting of course credit. Nursing education programs span institutions with different roles and missions and were not initially developed to provide student mobility through a career ladder. The nursing shortage and the changes in health care technology heavily influence practicing nurses to seek advanced degrees and continuing education, and simultaneously cause concern that there be no unreasonable barriers to their progress.

(D) Evaluation Processes

The plan will address the use of evaluation processes, which may include challenge exams, to maximize opportunities for receiving credit for both knowledge and clinical skills. The evaluation process extends beyond the transfer of credit among collegiate institutions to the evaluation of knowledge and clinical skills of nursing assistants, practical nurses, and registered nurses who have received their training and experience in non-collegiate settings. Nursing assistant instruction is offered through a combination of required course work and on-the-job training in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities. Many registered nurses in Washington report their highest level of preparation through hospital-based diploma programs. While there are no such diploma programs currently operating in Washington, these programs do exist in other states, and many nurses gain licensure in Washington by holding a valid license issued in another state.

PROPOSED STUDY DESIGN

I. Analysis of Data

National studies on nursing education and practice provide statistical data on programs, admissions, enrollments, and program completions. These studies will be used

to establish the context in which to view the nursing shortage. The National Commission on Nursing Implementation Project describes nursing as a profession in transition and identifies the role of higher education in that process.

A number of national health care issues cause the nursing shortage to be on the national agenda. The aging of the population, AIDS, changes in medical technology, changes in hospital care, and changes in nursing practice have all contributed to the national concern for adequate health care. The plan will address the impact of these issues on nursing education in Washington.

II. Profile of Washington Nurses and Nursing Students

The organization of nursing by certificate or licensure includes nursing assistant certified or nursing assistant registered, licensed practical nurse (LPN), associate degree registered nurse (ADN), and bachelor degree registered nurse (BSN). Additionally, masters and doctoral prepared nurses focus their graduate education on specific areas of specialty and research within the profession. Recent studies and surveys provide demographic information on licensed nurses and students currently enrolled in nursing programs in Washington.

III. Structure of Washington Educational Programs

The Washington State Board of Nursing and Washington State Board of Practical Nursing within the Department of Health have specific responsibilities for program approval, licensure, and issues of practice. The Washington Superintendent of Public Instruction has responsibility for program approval at high schools, secondary skill centers, and vocational-technical institutes. The State Board for Community College Education has responsibility for program approval at community colleges. The National League of Nursing is the professional accrediting association that establishes standards for its member programs. The Western Regional Accrediting Committee of the American Nurses Association is responsible for the approval of all continuing nursing education programs. At least two of these organizations provide the direction for nursing education programs at each Washington public and private institution.

Washington has a broad array of nursing programs that will be described by licensure preparation, educational or medical setting, and geographic location. Program enrollment levels will be discussed with an analysis of the number of qualified applicants to admissions; the enrollment limitations that may be institutionally imposed; and the potential unmet need that may exist. Program costs will be reviewed for on-campus, satellite, branch, and consortium programs to facilitate discussion and analysis of cost effective alternatives.

IV. Examination of Principal Problems Identified in Statute

The examination of the specific issues identified by statute will be presented with a dual analysis - considering the needs of the student as the consumer (adequate program information, consistency of program content and requirements, and mobility for further education within the profession), and considering the needs of the public as the consumer (adequate and appropriately educated nurses to meet health needs, and assurance of quality nursing skills and knowledge).

V. Factors Influencing the Issues

As a part of the examination of the issues, external environmental issues will be discussed. Already mentioned are the changes in hospital care to short term, critical care, using advanced technology. The hiring practices of urban medical centers have also changed; some no longer hire Licensed Practical Nurses, but will hire only Registered Nurses, preferring those with baccalaureate preparation. Concurrently, the differentiation in nursing practice is unclear. It is not uncommon that associate degree and baccalaureate degree registered nurses begin practice in the same job, and at the same salary. The method by which health care institutions charge for services includes line item costs for "specialty" services but includes nursing service in the base cost. The rural supply and demand for nursing education goes beyond the need for continuing education, workshops, and varied clinical experiences. There is concern that patients in small communities bypass their local hospitals for major medical centers because of the perception that local staff has insufficient training in the treatment of complex illnesses

and accidents. The availability of financial aid has major influence on the ability of nursing students to complete their programs. A number of environmental issues such as employment settings, and the emergence of other careers with greater professional opportunities for women also contribute to the nursing shortage.

VI. Review of other state plans

Washington is not alone in addressing the nursing shortage through the development of a state plan. As a part of this project, Board staff has requested the recent studies of all other states. To date, over half have sent plans or studies concerning nursing education and addressing the same issues. Such work will be evaluated relative to the similarity of the educational structure to that of Washington, whether or not the recommendations of the plans have been successfully implemented, and what components of those studies might provide assistance in addressing the nursing shortage in Washington.

VII. Related Projects in Washington

These issues are also being addressed by the nursing profession in Washington. There are a number of projects currently in progress that will be considered in the development of a state plan.

The Council on Nursing Education in Washington State is an organization of deans, directors, and supervisors of nursing programs from all vocational-technical institutes, community colleges, public and private colleges and universities. The semi-annual conferences of the Council provide a forum for communication among the leaders in nursing education and research in the state. A state survey on student applications, admissions, enrollments and program completions conducted by the Council will be made available to the HECB staff in November.

The Washington State Commission on Nursing is composed of representatives of state nursing organizations, employers of nurses, physicians, consumers, purchasers of nursing care, legislators, and educators. The purpose of the Commission is to bring

together a broad based representation of the health care industry, community, public and legislative arenas to evaluate the issues related to the nursing shortage. The final report of the Commission will include recommendations concerning nursing education.

Three recent Continuing Nursing Education Conferences have addressed issues cited in the legislative directive to the Board. The first was on Supply, Demand & Preparation of Nursing Personnel in Washington State, November 17, 1988, sponsored by the University of Washington School of Nursing and Seattle University School of Nursing.

A conference on Exploring Similarities and Defining Differences Between Associate Degree and Baccalaureate Nursing Graduates was held March 12, 1988, sponsored by the University of Washington School of Nursing, Shoreline Community College Department of Nursing Education and the Washington Center for Undergraduate Education (The Evergreen State College). The objectives of that conference were to:

- * develop collegial relationships among Associate and Baccalaureate Degree educators,
- * discuss content areas currently being taught in Associate and Baccalaureate Degree programs,
- * describe expected competencies for Associate and Baccalaureate Degree graduates at program completion, and
- * lay the groundwork for ongoing curricular clarification and articulation.

Staff attended the conference on Strategies for Evaluating Cognitive and Clinical Competence of Associate Degree and Baccalaureate Nursing Graduates, October 14, 1989, again sponsored by the University of Washington School of Nursing, Shoreline Community College Department of Nursing Education and the Washington Center for Undergraduate Education (The Evergreen State College). The objectives of this conference were to:

- * continue the constructive dialogue between two-year and four-year nurse educators,
- * increase awareness and stimulate interest in a variety of acceptable methods of evaluating previous learning, and
- * identify strategies for assessing cognitive and clinical competencies for students moving from two-year to four-year nursing programs.

VIII. The Role of Branch Campuses

One of the components of the branch campus study is to identify new program offerings. Nursing is one of the programs that is being evaluated for assessed need in the conduct of that study. The plan for nursing education will include any related conclusions and recommendations from the branch campus plans.

IX. Conclusions and Recommendations

As required by statute, alternative recommendations and strategies for strengthening nursing education will be brought to the Board for its consideration in responding to the expectations of the legislature.

PROPOSED TIME LINES

The following proposed time lines have been developed to ensure the timely completion of the plan, its adoption by the Board and its subsequent transmittal to the standing legislative committees on health care:

- Collection and compilation of national, regional, and state data on admissions, enrollments, graduations, licensure, and student demographics (September-December 1989)
- Review of state plans and analysis of recommendations (September-December 1989).

- Conduct of interviews with nursing educators, practicing nurses, employers, agency staff, legislators, and staff of health care associations (August 1989-January 1990).
- Establishment of advisory committee (January 1990) The role of the advisory group will be to review data for accuracy, assist in the analysis of recommendations from other state plans, and provide the forum to evaluate the draft report and staff recommendation to the Board.
- Discussion of alternative draft recommendations and associated costs with staff, advisory committee, etc. (March-May 1990).
- Development of implementation strategies responsive to the legislative requirements (June-July 1990).
- Preparation of draft report for Board consideration (September-October 1990).
- Preparation of final report for Board action (November 1990).
- Transmittal of final report to Legislative committees (December 1990).

ENGROSSED SENATE BILL 6152

NEW SECTION. Sec. 713. (1) The legislature finds that a current shortage of nurses exists in many areas of the state as well as in certain nurse specialties. Surveys of nurses in Washington state evidenced a need for more accessible education for advancement to higher levels of practice.

The legislature declares that there is a need for the development of a state-wide plan for nursing education to meet the educational needs of nurses and the health care needs of the citizens of Washington state.

(2) The higher education coordinating board, in consultation with at least the state board of nursing, the state board of practical nursing, representatives of the state board for community college education, the superintendent of public instruction, public and private nursing education, health care facilities, and practicing nurses, shall develop a state-wide plan to be implemented no later than January 1, 1992. The plan shall provide for:

(a) Geographic availability of nursing education and training programs;

(b) Curriculum standards for each type of nursing education and training program;

(c) Procedures to facilitate optimal transfer or granting of course credit; and

(d) The use of evaluation processes, which may include challenge exams, to maximize opportunities for receiving credit for both knowledge and clinical skills.

The higher education coordinating board shall submit a plan to the legislature by December 1, 1990. The board shall make a progress report to the senate and house of representatives standing committees on health care by December 1, 1989.