Kerisha Martin

Professional Nursing

As the role of nurses continue to evolve, nurses have come to accept and adjust to the many changes in the profession, and they try to make sense of the many important issues that the profession of nursing faces today. In a recent article, nursing leaders reveal some of the top trends affecting nurses. At the top of the list is the looming health care reform and its implications on nursing practice and healthcare. "Nurses are going to have an expanded role," said Rosemary E. Mortimer, MSEd, RN, CCBE, instructor at Johns Hopkins School of Nursing in Baltimore. She expects [registered nurses](http://www.nursezone.com/nursing-news-events/more-news.aspx?articleid=33230) will find new positions as hospitals expand, home care embraces telehealth, and prevention and lifestyle change comes to the forefront, while nurse practitioners will see greater demand for them to become front-line providers (Wood, 2011). In conjunction with these new legislations, the profession faces another challenge. That is, getting nurses to be more actively involved in shaping these laws and making their voices heard in the political arena, in an effort to outline new policies and to advocate for the good of the population. Thirdly, the increasing educational requirements and expectations for advancement of nurses on all levels of practice remain an issue. “If as most experts and data suggest the country needs more nurses, nursing leaders from the provider side and academia agree that the profession needs more faculty” (Wood, 2010). The main focus of nursing educators now is to help prepare new nurses and advance practice nurses to provide measureable, standardized clinical experiences, which will ensure the learning of the necessary competencies that are expected.

Healthcare reform will be a historic milestone in America’s history. With the passage of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA), millions of people will have greater protection against losing or being denied [health insurance](http://i.trkjmp.com/click?v=VVM6MTI5NTU6MjE4OmhlYWx0aCBpbnN1cmFuY2U6YjViYzA1N2YyMjQ4YTk3ZWYzMDc4M2RlMmVmYzMxNjI6ei0yMS0yODMwNzp3d3cubnVyc2luZ3dvcmxkLm9yZzoyNDA1OjE4YjVkYjRmY2IyYzBjMTI4ZTQ0MGY0YjMyNmM2ODhi) coverage, and better access to primary and preventive services. Many more Americans will be able to obtain insurance and will be seeking out healthcare services, which in the past, people of lower income and economic status were not able to enjoy. This population will no longer have to use emergency rooms for primary care and preventative medicine will be a priority. The implication is that nurses will be expected to care for higher volumes of complex, comprehensive patients within the home and community settings. Community health nursing will step to the forefront as nurses will be expected to bring their expertise into the communities. The American Nurses Association, 2012, states, “As the largest single group of clinical health care professionals within the health system, registered nurses are educated and practice within a holistic framework that views the individual, family and community as an interconnected system that can keep us well and help us heal. Registered nurses are fundamental to the critical shift needed in health services delivery, with the goal of transforming the current “sick care” system into a true “health care” system.

According to the American Journal of Nursing, 2011, nurses in particular are being called upon to parlay their expertise and experience into [careers](http://journals.lww.com/ajnonline/Fulltext/2011/05000/Politics__A_Natural_Next_Step_for_Nurses.16.aspx) in politics—and with great effect. It states, "Nurses possess a level of insight into health care issues and policymaking that makes their role invaluable." A case in point is the health care reform itself. An elected board will be appointed to make important decisions regarding the distribution and management of healthcare services. The article goes on to explain that nurses in political office would be able to offer a firsthand, accurate accounting of what happens on site in medical institutions, in private practice, and in [home health care](http://journals.lww.com/ajnonline/Fulltext/2011/05000/Politics__A_Natural_Next_Step_for_Nurses.16.aspx) environments. As a result of their experience, they are likely to do exactly what they've been doing in health care settings for years: adjust and adapt to ever-changing situations, listen carefully, assess, decide, think critically and deal thoughtfully with unexpected outcomes and turns of events. Although many nurses seem to be intimidated or uninterested in the political aspects of professional nursing, they can be very influential and instrumental in advocating for the change to benefit the greater community. Ballestas et al. 2008, explains it clearly. “Preparing professional nurses for community-based practice involving political activism and civic engagement requires developing and sustaining a philosophy that supports service learning and community partnerships. The concepts of service, community, collaboration, empowerment, and political activism are essential foundations. These ideas are inherent in educationally preparing nurses to meet the healthcare needs of individuals and communities.”

The third issue highlights what has been happening since the era of Florence Nightingale. Nurses have always been taking the initiative to further their education in an effort to continue to develop nursing as a respected profession. While nurses in the past needed only certificates or nursing diplomas in order to practice, today is much different. Even associate degree nurses have a difficult time getting into the workforce. Therefore, nurses who are equipped at a Baccalaureate level or higher have become more in demand and have been shown to be a valuable asset to organizations by increasing the standard of care that patients receive from these well educated, highly skilled nurses. Surveys show that most hospitals prefer to hire nurses with bachelor’s degrees, though they often cannot find enough. Lawmakers in several states, including New York, have introduced bills that would require at least some hospital staff nurses to have bachelor’s degrees within 10 years, though none have become law. Still, professional groups and employers continue to push for more education, citing studies linking better-educated nurses to better patient care. State lawmakers will reconsider a proposal in coming years that would require new registered nurses to earn a four year degree within 10 years to keep working in New York. The bill is part of a national push to address a nationwide shortage in skilled nurses. It's called "BSN in 10" an initiative, sponsored by Morelle, that would require new registered nurses to get a four year degree 10 years from the time they are licensed if they want to continue working in New York State. These laws, which are likely to be adopted nationwide, will indirectly help nurses to become more marketable in years to come, especially with the healthcare reform scheduled to take full effect in 2014. Some provisions that will directly affect nurses include reauthorization of Title V111 nursing workforce development programs. “These programs, under the Public Health Service Act, are the primary source of federal funding for nursing education and help insure that there will be enough nurses in the future to care for the masses who will need healthcare” (Frellick, 2010). These major grant programs include advanced education nursing, nurse-family home visit partnerships, and nurse-managed clinics-to name a few.

In the final analysis, the United States now faces a plethora of changes in healthcare, adjustments in prescription costs, an aging population, and more. This is a time when nurses will be expected to do more and extend themselves even farther. It is also a time when nurses in politics can serve best. Although the hours may be long and the learning curve steep, the rewards of fighting for change and speaking for a large segment of the population are great. A nurse who is elected to office can speak out on behalf of these large groups and win support for policies that are important to those who work in America's health care system and those who depend upon it. As nurses, let us never stop learning. Nurses must continually educate themselves to keep abreast of all the changes in health care. On a larger scale, it is important to preserve the quality of care that nursing practice provides to the community and it should not be diminished. The need for continuing education reflects the constantly developing nature of the nursing field. Nurses therefore need to prepare themselves to move forward as the profession moves forward.

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