

## **WONE Position Statement on the Educational Preparation of the Nurse Leader**

The Wisconsin Organization of Nurse Executives (WONE) supports the advancement of education for nurses. In 2010, the Institute of Medicine of the National Academies (IOM, 2010) produced the landmark report, *The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health*. One of the four key messages stated that nurses should achieve higher levels of education and training through an improved education system that promotes seamless academic progression. Patient needs have become more complicated, and nurses need to attain requisite competencies to deliver high-quality care. These competencies include leadership, health policy, system improvement, research and evidence-based practice, and teamwork and collaboration. Nurses must achieve higher levels of education and training to respond to these increasing demands. Education should include opportunities for seamless transition into higher degree programs—from licensed practical nurse (LPN)/licensed vocational nurse (LVN) diplomas; to the associate's (ADN) and bachelor's (BSN) degrees; to master's (MSN), and doctor of nursing practice (DNP), and PhD degrees.

The American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) has published two documents that address graduate education in nursing; *The Essentials of Doctoral Education for Advanced Nursing Practice* (AACN, 2006), and *The Essentials of Master's Education in Nursing* (AACN, 2011), complementary guidelines that provide direction for nurses seeking graduate degrees.

Master's education prepares nurses for flexible leadership and critical action within complex, changing systems, including health, educational, and organizational systems. Master's education equips nurses with valuable knowledge and skills to lead change, promote health, and elevate care in various roles and settings.

Master's education remains a critical component of the nursing education trajectory to prepare nurses who can address the gaps resulting from growing health care needs. Nurses who obtain the competencies outlined in the *Essentials of Master's Education* (AACN, 2011) have significant value for current and emerging roles in health care delivery and design through advanced nursing knowledge and higher level leadership skills for improving health outcomes. For some nurses, master's education prepares them with a fulfilling lifetime expression of their mastery area. For others, this core is a graduate foundation for doctoral education. Each preparation is valued.

In 2004, AACN wrote the *Position Statement on the Practice Doctorate in Nursing* (AACN, 2004) that calls for a transformational change in the education required for professional nurses who will practice at the most advanced level of nursing. The recommendation that nurses practicing at the highest level should receive doctoral level preparation emerged from multiple factors including the expansion of scientific knowledge required for safe nursing practice and growing concerns regarding the quality of patient care delivery and outcomes. Practice demands associated with an increasingly complex health care system created a mandate for reassessing the education for evidence-based practice for all health professionals, including nurses.

The DNP is a degree title, like the PhD or MSN, and does not designate in what specialty a graduate is prepared. DNP graduates will be prepared for a variety of nursing practice roles. The *Essentials of Doctoral Education for Advanced Nursing Practice* (AACN, 2006) addresses the foundational competencies that are core to all advanced nursing practice roles. However, the depth and focus of the core competencies will vary based on the particular role for which the student is preparing. For example, students preparing for organizational leadership or administrative roles will have increased depth in organizational and systems' leadership; those preparing for policy roles will have increased depth in health care policy; and those preparing for advanced practice nursing (APN) roles (nurse practitioners, clinical nurse specialists, nurse anesthetists, and nurse midwives) will have more specialized content in an area of advanced practice nursing. The practice doctorate prepares individuals at the highest level of practice and is the terminal practice degree.

At this time there is a need to credential nursing leaders with an advanced degree, which creates parity with the other health care professionals who have adopted the doctorate as a practice credential. A nurse with

the DNP degree is prepared to lead at the highest clinical administrative and executive ranks, and will be able to draw upon his or her education and clinical expertise to effect change in organizations and across health care systems.

WONE recognizes there are nursing leaders who are prepared at a variety of educational levels. Our organization challenges leaders to evaluate their professional development related to their roles, and encourages individuals to advance their educational preparation.

WONE recognizes the value of advanced degrees such as MBA, MHA, EdD, or PhD. At the executive level, nursing leaders should aspire to the DNP as the terminal degree for advanced nursing practice. At the operational level, including such positions as director, manager, and supervisor, a master of science in nursing (MSN) degree is recommended until the time that the leader seeks a promotion to the next administrative level position. Leaders in these positions should hold the educational degree a level higher than or equal to those who they supervise. These educational levels will enhance a leader's ability to be visionary, and provide direction and guidance to those whom they lead.

As stated in the IOM Future of Nursing Report, efforts to cultivate and promote leaders within the nursing profession—from the front lines of care to the boardroom—will prepare nurses with the skills needed to help improve health care and advance their profession. As leaders, nurses must act as full partners in redesign efforts, be accountable for their own contributions to delivering high-quality care, and work collaboratively with leaders from other health professions (IOM, 2010).

#### References

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