


Navigating Nursing Education

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Purpose/Goal

To provide the learner with knowledge of nursing education options, types of degrees, practice roles, and accreditation.

Objectives

1. Describe the Institute of Medicine's goals for nursing.
2. Discuss types of nursing education.
3. Discuss areas of focus in postgraduate nursing education.

Accreditation

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Conflict-of-Interest Disclosures

Rodney W. Hicks, PhD, RN, FNP-BC, FAAN, FAANP, and Robert Patterson, DNP, MSN, RN, CNML, have no declared affiliations that could be perceived as posing potential conflicts of interest in the publication of this article.

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ABSTRACT

All nurses must embrace lifelong learning and engage in academic progression to help transform health care. This article explores the various forms of nursing education and focuses on the types of degrees available, different practice roles and pathways, types of educational institutions and programs, and accreditation and its governing bodies. The benefits to nurses who pursue additional education include career mobility, additional responsibilities, and personal satisfaction. The benefits to patients include receiving the most current evidence-based care from a more highly educated and competent workforce. *AORN J* 106 (December 2017) 523-533. © AORN, Inc, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aorn.2017.10.001>

Key words: *nursing education, advanced degrees, postlicensure education, career mobility, accreditation.*

In 2011, the Institute of Medicine released *The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health*,¹ a report that identified professional nurses as well suited to address many of the challenges facing health care. The success of health care professionals in delivering safe, effective, evidence-based, patient-centered care depends on the future of nursing. The report's second key message emphasized the need for nurses to achieve higher levels of education and training. Furthermore, the report challenged the educational system to offer seamless academic progression (ie, the ability for nurses to move through higher levels of education more efficiently and at a lower cost).¹

Two other recommendations from the Institute of Medicine's report were to increase the percentage of nurses with baccalaureate degrees from approximately 50% to 80% by 2020 (Recommendation 4) and to double the current percentage (3% to 5%) of nurses with doctoral degrees by 2020 (Recommendation 5).¹ Future AORN surveys will be needed to measure perioperative nurses' progress toward meeting these goals.

Academic progression is not new in the nursing profession. As far back as the 1920s, professional nursing associations recognized that nurses should seek higher education. Today, many opportunities exist for nurses to participate in lifelong learning and achieve educational advancement. Academic progression can lead to career advancement, which, in turn, allows nurses to improve practice outcomes through evidence-based practice.²

In this article, we describe contemporary trends in nursing education and the benefits of higher education. A nursing education program is a formal program that leads to an academic degree, regardless of whether the program is offered by a school or college of nursing, a department of nursing, or another academic unit. This article limits discussion to postlicensure RN education. The focus of postlicensure education is to broaden a nurse's ability to contribute meaningfully to the practice, to the profession, and to society as a whole. When a nurse attains higher education, this does not mean he or she must then leave the perioperative practice. Rather, nurses who receive advanced education are

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