



Nurses leading change to advance health

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ABSTRACT

Background: The article includes a review of selected past and current leadership initiatives as well as a summary of three leadership meetings convened by The Center to Champion Nursing in America, a partnership of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), AARP and the AARP Foundation.

Purpose: These “Leadership in Action” meetings were designed to address the Campaign for Action’s (CFA) goal to increase the number of nurse leaders in health- and health care-related boardrooms at the local, state and national levels.

Methods: RWJF supported key nursing organizations in initial discussions around integrating state and national efforts to get more nurses onto boards leading to a active vibrant coalition making significant progress.

Conclusion: This article concludes with a call to action encouraging all nurses to consider board service as an essential component of improving health and health care and to do their part to help build a Culture of Health in the United States.

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Introduction

This is a historic moment for nursing. Nurses and their allies have had more than 6 years to adopt and begin implementing changes recommended in the Institute of Medicine (IOM) report, *The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health* (2010). Together, nurse leaders and others are executing strategies from that report that will enhance the leadership capacity of nurses and convince other health care stakeholders to recognize the value of nurse leaders.

This article offers an overview of selected past and current initiatives designed to advance the leadership issues discussed in the report of the fifth chapter of IOM, “Transforming Leadership.” There will be a summary of leadership meetings convened by The Center to Champion Nursing in America (CCNA). The outcome of these meetings provided impetus to develop a successful National Nurses on Boards Coalition. Additional successful leadership initiatives since the IOM report was released are highlighted, and next steps are outlined.

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Leadership in Nursing: Perspectives on National Initiatives

For 15 consecutive years, Americans have ranked nursing as the most trusted profession (Gallup, 2016). Yet, nurses as the largest sector of health care professionals have considerably less influence on health policy than the public's trust would imply. Nurses represent the largest number of health professionals in homes, community clinics, nursing homes, intensive care units, birthing centers, hospice centers, urgent care clinics, and many other health care facilities, yet are rarely represented at the tables where transformational health care decision-making occurs. Nurses have fundamental knowledge of health care delivery and care across the continuum, and health care policymaking suffers without this knowledge. The IOM report was a wake-up call that the country needs more nurses in leadership roles. In response, the *Future of Nursing: Campaign for Action* (CFA) is encouraging insurers, provider organizations, and all those responsible for health and health care decision-making to ensure that nurses are placed on each and every health care decision-making board, now and in the future to assure the voices of patients and consumers are heard.

The CFA recognizes the importance of raising awareness about the value of nurse leadership and forging relationships with key colleagues and health systems. The nation's health care system will benefit when nurses seize opportunities to serve in leadership roles that commensurate with the trust bestowed on them by consumers. Collaboration between consumers, state and national health care entities, and nursing is needed to strengthen our nation's health care system. Many U.S. citizens felt the effects of shortages in the health care workforce; experiencing the difficulties of having to wait 3 weeks for an urgent appointment and facing barriers to accessing health care services. Our nation is facing a major transformation of our health care system and needs the focused attention and expertise that nurses can bring to policy tables in our health care systems, communities, and capitals.

CCNA and Nursing Leadership Before the Release of the IOM

CCNA was established in 2007 to strengthen the nation's nursing workforce (RWJF, 2017). In 2009, CCNA coordinated a state-level pilot program to foster board participation among nurses in Virginia, New Jersey, and Rhode Island. AARP state offices and state chapters of the American Nurses Association (ANA) collaborated to convene nurses and other state leaders from health care, business, education, nonprofit, government, and

other sectors. Each state organized a 1-day event to create opportunities for these leaders to meet, network, and discuss why the skills nurse leaders possess are valuable and relevant to various organizations. This followed a national RWJF-supported program called *Nurse Leaders in the Boardroom*, which worked to place nurses in key national positions on a variety of boards representing journals and health care organizations not centered on nursing.

CCNA also created an introductory program called *Nurse Leaders in the Boardroom—The Skills You Need to Be Successful on a Board* to help prepare emerging nurse leaders considering board appointments. It was developed with input from a number of well-respected nurse leaders who had served on boards. It includes videotaped interviews with nurse leaders about their insights and experience serving on boards, an overview of the skills nurses need to serve on boards, and tips on how to build the network and experience required to become leaders. Hundreds of DVDs were distributed, and the ANA uses the video as part of its leadership initiatives.

RWJF and the CFA

From its founding more than 40 years ago, RWJF has invested in nursing leadership programs to create a community of stellar diverse leaders in management, education, policy, and research (Hassmiller, 2013). Many RWJF programs have supported nurses who became esteemed leaders at the local, state, national, and international levels. These nurses are recognized as thought leaders and are credited with improving health care delivery in the areas of health services, research, public health systems, and health economics.

A new level of commitment to nursing leadership emerged in 2010 with the release of *The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health* report outlining recommendations for transforming leadership. The report states that strong leadership is required to realize the vision of a transformed health care system (Institute of Medicine, 2010, p. 221). In addition, the report suggested that to be able to provide this strong leadership, nurses will need leadership skills and competencies to act as full partners with physicians and other health professionals in redesign and reform efforts across the health care system. The report's key messages and recommendations related to leadership follow:

- Key message no. 3: Nurses should be full partners, with physicians and other health care professionals, in redesigning health care in the United States.
- Recommendation no. 2: Expand opportunities for nurses to lead and diffuse collaborative improvement efforts.

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