

From the Editor-in-Chief

# The Transformation of Nursing and Health Care – The Stars Have Aligned to Unleash the Power of Nurses

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To say the stars aligned in the Spring of 2021 would be an understatement. Rarely have the visions of so many health care thought leaders been so congruent in recognizing opportunity, need, and the competence, knowledge, access, and expertise of nurses. The National Academy of Medicine (NAM), the International Council of Nurses (ICN), the American Nurses

Association (ANA), the Tri-Council, and the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) have all called for the transformation of health care and/or nursing. The works of these independent organizations, some of which had been in progress for several years, all came forward within a few weeks of each other with remarkable similarity in their identification of needs, solutions, and the role of nursing as the group best qualified and positioned to accomplish this transformation of nursing and health care.

## The Future of Nursing 2020-2030

The National Academy of Medicine (NAM), formerly called the Institute of Medicine (IOM), was created in 1970 as part of the National Academy of Sciences to advise the nation on medical and health care issues. NAM brings together experts to gather and examine evidence in specific areas of interest and concern. The expert groups then create peer-reviewed consensus study reports with their findings, conclusions, and recommendations. These reports are valued not only by those of us in health care but also by other stakeholders for their thoroughness, thoughtfulness, and leadership. Examples of NAM (IOM) reports include *To Err Is Human: Building a Safer Health System* (2000), *Crossing the Quality Chasm: A New Health System for the 21st Century* (2001), *Health Professions Education: A Bridge to Quality* (2003), *Keeping Patients Safe. Transforming the Work Environments of Nurses* (2004), *Preventing Medication Errors* (2007), *The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health* (2011), and *Assessing Progress on the Institute of Medicine Report – The Future of Nursing* (2016). All of their reports have had a profound and positive effect on health care professionals and on the populations we serve.

The first Future of Nursing report called for bold extensive progress in improving the capacity and education of

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nurses and called on and supported nurses to play a key role in improving health care. In 2016, the NAM assessed change since publication of the report and found much progress, but also found more that needed to be done. They noted three themes that would be central to future success:

- The need to build a broader coalition to increase awareness of nurses’ ability to play a full role in health professions practice, education, collaboration, and leadership;
- The need to continue to make promoting diversity in the nursing workforce a priority; and
- The need for better data with which to assess and drive progress (p. 24).

Their most recent report is *The Future of Nursing 2020-2030: Charting a Path to Achieve Health Equity*. “The nation,” the foreword of the report says, “cannot achieve true health equity without nurses, which means it must do better for nurses” (pp. x-xi). The Future of Nursing committee recognized the role of nurses before and during the pandemic and noted that “caring for highly infectious patients with dire needs had sweeping adverse impacts on the physical and mental health of scores of thousands of the nation’s nurses” (p. xiv).

The vision of the Future of Nursing committee is “the achievement of health equity in the United States built on strengthening nursing capacity and expertise” (p. 1). Their recommendations are:

- **Creating a shared agenda.** In 2021, all national nursing organizations should initiate work to develop a shared agenda for addressing social determinants of health (SDH) and achieving health equity.
- **Supporting nurses to advance health equity.** By 2023, initiate substantive actions to enable the nursing workforce to address SDH and health equity more comprehensively, regardless of practice setting.
- **Promoting nurses’ health and well-being.** By 2021, initiate the implementation of structures, systems, and evidence-based interventions to promote nurses’ health and well-being.

- **Capitalizing on nurses' potential.** Enable nurses to practice to the full extent of their education and training by removing barriers that prevent them from fully addressing social needs and SDH and improving health care access, quality, and value.
- **Paying for nursing care.** Establish sustainable and flexible payment mechanisms to support nurses in both health care and public health, including school nurses, in addressing social needs, SDH, and health equity.
- **Using technology to integrate data on SDH into nursing practice.** All public and private health care systems should incorporate nursing expertise in designing, generating, analyzing, and applying data to support initiatives focused on SDH and health equity.
- **Strengthening nursing education.** Nursing education programs, including continuing education, accreditors, and the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN), should ensure that nurses are prepared to address SDH and achieve health equity.
- **Preparing nurses to respond to disasters and public health emergencies.** Strengthen and protect the nursing workforce during the response to such public health emergencies as the pandemic and natural disasters, including those related to climate change.
- **Building the evidence base.** Public and private associations and foundations should convene representatives from nursing, public health, and health care to develop and support a research agenda and evidence base describing the impact of nursing interventions, including multisector collaboration, on SDH, environmental health, health equity, and nurses' health and well-being.

The Future of Nursing report recognizes the societal obligation to achieve health equity and the value and potential of nurses in meeting that obligation, including the ability of nurses to lead change. Importantly, the report equally recognizes that nurses can only meet this need if they are educated, supported, and allowed to practice to the full extent of their education and training. It is telling that the NAM (2021) resource site that supports the Future of Nursing report is entitled "Unleashing the Power of the Nurse to Achieve Health Equity."

The Future of Nursing report is 470 pages long and full of great information on the nursing workforce, SDH, health equity, supporting the health and well-being of nurses, and nurses leading change. The NAM Future of Nursing resource page provides ongoing information. In addition, the Campaign for Action has a website with news and resources (<https://campaignforaction.org/>).

## International Council of Nursing

Transforming nursing and health care is a worldwide vision. The ICN theme for 2021 is *Nurses: A Voice to Lead – A Vision for Future Healthcare*. Their goals are to show how nursing will look in the future and how the profession will transform the next stage of health care. The actions needed to

support nursing identified by the ICN include a safe place to work, recognizing the vital role of nursing, investment, evolving the profession, and education and professional development. The actions to transform health care include caring for vulnerable people, trusted communication, public health, access and innovation, quality and affordable care, and healthy homes and healthy communities.

## American Nurses Association – Revised Nursing Scope and Standards of Practice

In May, ANA (2021) published the 4th edition of *Nursing Scope and Standards of Practice*. There are many changes in the 4th edition, starting with the definition of nursing.

Nursing integrates the art and science of caring and focuses on the protection, promotion, and optimization of health and human functioning; prevention of illness and injury; facilitation of healing; and alleviation of suffering through compassionate presence. Nursing is the diagnosis and treatment of human responses and advocacy in the care of individuals, families, groups, communities, and populations in recognition of the connection of all humanity (ANA, 2021, p. 1).

Caring is the core concept of this revised definition, with an additional emphasis on compassionate presence and the recognition of the connection of all humanity.

Key changes to the standards include:

- The addition of a new standard on advocacy requiring RNs to demonstrate advocacy in all roles and settings.
- The addition of a new standard on respect and equitable practice requiring RNs to practice with cultural humility and inclusiveness.
- Modifying the planning standard from developing a plan that prescribes strategies and alternatives to a developing a collaborative plan encompassing strategies.
- Modifying the standard on evidence-based practice and research to be a standard on scholarly inquiry that requires RNs to integrate scholarship, evidence, and research findings in practice.
- Revising the standard on resource utilization to a standard on resource stewardship, emphasizing the need to use resources judiciously.

There are detailed competencies delineated for each standard that are expected of every RN. There are additional competencies expected of all graduate-level prepared RNs and additional competencies for advanced practice RNs (APRNs).

## Tri-Council for Nursing

The Tri-Council began in the 1970s as a collaboration between ANA, the National League for Nursing (NLN),

and the AACN. The Tri-Council today is an alliance including ANA, NLN, the AACN, the NCSBN, and the American Organization for Nursing Leadership (AONL).

In early 2021, the TriCouncil published *Transforming Together: Implications and Opportunities from the COVID-19 Pandemic for Nursing Education, Practice, and Regulation*, describing the results of a virtual summit of over 120 nursing and health care stakeholders representing a cross-section of health care settings, functional levels, and sectors. Six themes of transformational opportunities were identified:

- Equity and health equity – Health care access for all, culturally informed care, and determinants of health.
- Ethics – Ethical guidelines during a crisis, duty to care for all patients during a crisis, duty to self during a crisis.
- Nursing workforce – Dynamic care team models, public and population health linkages, workforce-patient safety.
- Innovation – Telehealth reimbursement, mapping and managing the spread, surge capacity, unbounded nursing education, virtual teaching and learning, APRN full scope model.
- Inter-professional emergency planning and response – Consumer and responder communication, rapid research-practice application, rapid resource mobilization.
- Mental health and well-being – Mental health and well-being during a crisis, long-term mental health impacts.

These themes and their components create a framework for collaboration on transforming nursing and health care.

## American Association of Colleges of Nursing – New Plan for Professional Nursing Education

In April 2021, the AACN adopted new essentials for professional nursing education. Unlike the previous essentials, which delineated separate essentials for baccalaureate, masters, and doctoral nursing education, these new essentials provide a framework that represents a continuum of education with progressive competencies. These essentials identify 10 domains of professional nursing practice with competencies for each that are the same for entry-level professional nursing education and advanced level nursing education.

- Knowledge for nursing practice.
- Person-centered care.
- Population health.
- Scholarship for nursing practice.
- Quality and safety.
- Interprofessional partnerships.
- Systems-based practice.
- Information and health care technologies.
- Professionalism.
- Personal, professional, and leadership development.

Each competency has sub-competencies that build from entry level professional nursing practice to advanced levels

(AACN, 2021, p. 2). Eight concepts are integrated within and across the domains and competencies: clinical judgment, communication, compassionate care, diversity, equity, and inclusion, ethics, evidence-based practice, health policy, and social determinants of health. Integrating the essentials provides a clear path for the development of progressive professional nursing education.

## Unleashing the Power of Nurses – An Opportunity and a Challenge

How often have we said, both as individuals and as a profession, “if they would just let us, we could fix this?” Now nursing and health care thought leaders have either called our bluff or given us the biggest opportunity we have ever had to fix things – most notably, health equity. In addition, they have recognized not only the expertise of nurses, but also the support nurses need to get the job done. We have some other important advantages. We are the largest health care profession – over 4,000,000 strong – and we have the highest level of trust from the public.

It won't be easy, and it won't happen overnight. It will require the commitment and engagement of nurses in all roles and all specialties. Never have we been in a better position to effect positive change in the health and the health care of individuals and populations. The power of nurses has been unleashed.

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