

Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) Talking Points

In October 2004, the members of the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) endorsed the *Position Statement on the Practice Doctorate in Nursing* which called for moving the level of preparation necessary for advanced nursing practice roles from the master's degree to the doctorate level by the year 2015. The AACN position statement calls for educating advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs) and other nurses seeking top clinical positions in Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) programs. The talking points below were developed to help explain this evolutionary step forward for nursing.

The Need for Change in Graduate Nursing Education

- The changing demands of the nation's complex health care environment require that nurses serving in specialty positions have the highest level of scientific knowledge and practice expertise possible. Research from Drs. Linda Aiken, Carole Estabrooks, Christopher Friese, and others have established a clear link between higher levels of nursing education and better patient outcomes.
- Some of the many factors which are building momentum for change in nursing education at the graduate level include: the rapid expansion of knowledge underlying practice; increased complexity of patient care; national concerns about the quality of care and patient safety; shortages of nursing personnel which demands a higher level of preparation for leaders who can design and assess care; shortages of doctorally prepared faculty, and increasing educational expectations for other health professionals.
- The Institute of Medicine, Joint Commission, and other authorities have called for reconceptualizing health professions education to meet the needs of the health care delivery system. Nursing is answering that call by moving to prepare APRNs for evolving practice.
- In a 2005 report titled *Advancing the Nation's Health Needs: NIH Research Training Programs*, the National Academy of Sciences called for nursing to develop a "non-research clinical doctorate" to prepare expert practitioners who can also serve as clinical faculty. AACN's work to advance the DNP is consistent with this call to action.
- Nursing is moving in the direction of other health professions in the transition to the DNP. Medicine (MD), Dentistry (DDS), Pharmacy (PharmD), Psychology (PsyD), Physical Therapy (DPT) and Audiology (AudD) all offer practice doctorates.

Impact on Nursing Education and Practice

- Currently, advanced practice nurses, including Nurse Practitioners, Clinical Nurse Specialists, Nurse Mid-Wives, and Nurse Anesthetists, are typically prepared in

master's degree programs, some of which carry a credit load equivalent to doctoral degrees in the other health professions.

- DNP curricula build on current master's programs by providing education in evidence-based practice, quality improvement, and systems thinking among other key areas.
- Transitioning to the DNP will not alter the current scope of practice for APRNs. State Nurse Practice Acts describe the scope of practice allowed, and these differ from state to state. (These requirements would likely remain unchanged.) The transition to the DNP will better prepare APRNs for their current roles given the calls for new models of education and the growing complexity of health care.
- The DNP is designed for nurses seeking a terminal degree in nursing practice and offers an alternative to research-focused doctoral programs. DNP-prepared nurses will be well-equipped to fully implement the science developed by nurse researchers prepared in PhD, DNSc, and other research-focused nursing doctorates.
- The title of Doctor is common to many disciplines and is not the domain of any one health profession. Many APRNs currently hold doctoral degrees and are addressed as "doctors," which is similar to how clinical psychologists, dentists, podiatrists, and other experts are addressed. Like other providers, DNPs would be expected to display their credentials to insure that patients understand their preparation as a nursing provider.
- Nursing and medicine are distinct health disciplines that prepare clinicians to assume different roles and meet different practice expectations. DNP programs will prepare nurses for the highest level of nursing practice.

DNP Transition in Progress

- With 92 DNP programs now enrolling students nationwide, more than 100 additional practice doctorates are also under development at U.S. nursing schools.
- The movement to the DNP has raised many questions about the future of nursing education, certification, regulation and practice. AACN created two task forces, the DNP *Essentials* and the DNP Roadmap task forces, to define the essential curricular elements of nursing practice doctorates and to address key operational and transition concerns. The results of these two task forces are posted on the Web at <http://www.aacn.nche.edu/DNP/pdf/Essentials.pdf> and <http://www.aacn.nche.edu/DNP/pdf/DNPRoadmapreport.pdf>.
- The Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE), the leading accrediting agency for baccalaureate and higher degree nursing programs in the U.S., has initiated a process for accrediting DNP programs as recommended in AACN's 2004 position statement.
- More information about the national movement toward the DNP is posted on AACN's Web site at <http://www.aacn.nche.edu/DNP/index.htm>.