



On the Front Lines of the Military Nurse Shortage

*Sponsored by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing
in collaboration with
Senators Richard Durbin and Barbara Mikulski*

On April 8, 2008, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) hosted a Military Nurse Shortage Briefing in the U.S. Capitol Building. The following nursing leaders presented unique perspectives on the military nurse shortage: Major General Gale Pollock, CRNA, RN, FACHE, Deputy Surgeon General for Force Management and Chief of the Army Nurse Corps; Colonel Linda Kisner, MS, RN, Director of Air Force Nursing Services at Headquarters Air Force, Office of the Surgeon General; Captain Kathleen Pierce, MS, RN, Deputy Director of the Navy Nurse Corps, Bureau of Medicine; and Kathryn Lothschuetz Montgomery, PhD, RN, CNAA, Associate Dean, Organizational Partnerships, Outreach and Clinical Enterprise at the University of Maryland, School of Nursing.



From Left: Dr. Lothschuetz Montgomery, Captain Pierce, Dr. Bednash, Colonel Kisner, and Major General Pollock

AACN Executive Director Dr. Geraldine Bednash began the event by emphasizing the severe nursing shortage in the civilian sector. Dr. Bednash explained that the quality and safety of our nation's healthcare continues to be negatively impacted by the nursing shortage. However, the root cause of the current shortage is a significant lack of qualified and expert nurse faculty to educate the next generation of nurses. Dr. Bednash explained that this inadequate supply of nurse faculty is hindering the ability to increase student capacity in schools of nursing. At a time when there is such a tremendous need for nurses, schools of nursing are forced to turn away thousands of qualified applicants each year.



According to AACN's 2007-2008 annual survey, U.S. nursing schools turned away 40,285 qualified applicants from baccalaureate and graduate programs in academic year 2007. The top reason cited for not accepting all qualified applicants was the shortage of faculty. This shortage of nurse educators affects both the civilian and the military sectors, as the military recruits from civilian schools of nursing.

Dr. Bednash highlighted the innovative legislative strategy of Senator Richard Durbin (D-IL), the Troops to Nurse Teachers Act of 2008 (S. 2705), as one method to address the workforce needs of both the military and civilian sectors. For the past three years, AACN and the larger nursing community have been working with Senator Durbin and his Defense Authorization and Appropriations colleagues on the pilot program that is aimed at encouraging military nurses, during varying stages of their career, to become nurse educators. The ultimate goal is to increase the number of nurse faculty members so schools of nursing may expand enrollments and alleviate the ongoing shortage. For more information see:

<http://www.aacn.nche.edu/Media/NewsReleases/2008/TNTAct.html>

http://www.aacn.nche.edu/Government/pdf/08TNT_FS.pdf

Major General (MG) Pollock was the first of the distinguished panelists to speak and commented that in order for the Army Nurse Corps to meet its missions, an increase in qualified nurses who are educated at the baccalaureate level is needed. MG Pollock did express her commitment to alleviating the nurse faculty shortage. Currently, the Army Nurse Corps is sponsoring six nurses



at the University of Maryland who are serving as clinical and didactic faculty members. MG Pollock explained that these types of partnership are a way to illustrate to Congress their effectiveness. While She is glad to see the success of this partnership and noted that this type of program is effective, her top priority is ensuring that the Army Nurse Corps has the nurses needed to meet its missions. MG Pollock also touched on a major issue facing future nurse faculty, low salary.

Current salary for nurse faculty is dismal in comparison to the pay of retired Nurse Corps Officers or practicing clinical providers, a point that

AACN echoes and recognizes as a growing concern. In concluding, MG Pollock emphasized that collaboration needs to continue between the military and civilian nursing sectors, as well as Congress to address the military nursing shortage.

Colonel (Col.) Kisner, attending on behalf of Major General Melissa Rank, addressed the audience by explaining the Air Force Nurse Corps need for scholarships. She commented that stronger educational benefits must be in place, particularly for nurses seeking to obtain their doctoral degree in nursing. Additional recruitment and retention efforts would bolster their ranks of advanced practice nurses and researchers. At the same time, and much like the Army, the Air Force Nurse Corps is also in need of a stronger supply of nurses who are prepared at the baccalaureate level.



Captain Pierce specifically addressed the concerns of the Navy Nurse Corps. She explained that they have not met their yearly recruitment goals and are also concerned with the ability to retain the expert nurses currently in their branch. Similar to the other branches, Captain Pierce stressed the need for baccalaureate prepared nurses in the Navy. She also expressed that the Navy Nurse Corps does offer professionally rewarding careers, as many nurses are looking for varying opportunities and benefits.



Dr. Lothschuetz Montgomery discussed the rich partnership the University of Maryland has with the Army Nurse Corps. As MG Pollock described, six Army Nurse Officers are currently serving as faculty. Dr. Lothschuetz Montgomery stressed the powerful impact these expert nurses are making in the lives of students, other faculty, and within the community. The University of Maryland feels fortunate that they are able to enrich their nursing community with the addition of these faculty members.

AACN was delighted to host this event in collaboration with Senators Durbin and Mikulski. It was attended by Congressional staff from both the House and Senate and sparked thoughtful conversation from the audience. AACN continues to work with partners in the nursing community to advocate on behalf of the Troops to Nurse Teachers Act of 2008. As evidenced from this event, solutions can be achieved through continued partnerships between Congress, the military Nurse Corps, and national nursing organizations. For more information on this legislative initiative, please contact AACN's Government Affairs Director, Suzanne Begeny, at sbegeny@aacn.nche.edu

