

Changing the Face of the Nursing Profession

Nursing's academic leaders have long recognized the strong connection between a culturally diverse nursing workforce and the ability to provide quality patient care. According to the National Advisory Council on Nurse Education and Practice, policy advisors to Congress and the Secretary of Health and Human Services, diversifying the nursing profession is essential to meeting the health care needs of the nation and reducing health disparities that exist among many underserved populations.

Though nursing schools have made great strides in recruiting nurses from diverse backgrounds, more must be done before adequate representation becomes a reality. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, one in every three U.S. residents is classified as a member of a minority population. AACN's latest enrollment data show an increase in minority representation across all types of professional nursing programs. Students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds now comprise about one quarter of those enrolled in entry-level baccalaureate (26.0%), master's (23.4%) and research-focused doctoral (21.0%) programs in nursing. Though these numbers are moving in the right direction, the schools of nursing still have more work to do.

The drive to attract diverse nursing students is paralleled by the need to recruit more minority faculty. Few nurses from groups underrepresented in nursing – specifically, African Americans, Alaskan Natives, American Indians, Asians, and Hispanics – pursue careers as educators. AACN data show that only 11.5% of full-time nurse faculty in professional nursing programs come from minority backgrounds. A lack of representative educators may send a signal to potential students that nursing does not value diversity. Students looking for academic role models to encourage and enrich their learning are often frustrated in their attempts to find mentors and a community of support.

AACN is working with The California Endowment, the Johnson & Johnson Campaign for Nursing's Future, the Sullivan Alliance, and the recommendations from the Academic Careers Task Force to help remedy these critical issues. Through our efforts to provide scholarships and leadership development opportunities to minority students pursuing graduate degrees, AACN is creating a cadre of future nurse educators and leaders of the profession. Our work to embed new standards related to cultural competency in the *Baccalaureate Essentials* will help to better equip future nurses to care for an increasingly diverse patient population.

AACN commends our member institutions for their own innovative efforts to enhance diversity and prepare new graduates with enhanced levels of cultural competency. AACN is striving to be your partner in this important work by providing the resources and support needed to help change the face of the nursing profession.

ADVANCING HIGHER EDUCATION IN NURSING