February 13, 2015

The Honorable Fred Upton
Chairman, House Energy and Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

As the national voice for baccalaureate and graduate nursing education, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing’s (AACN) membership is comprised of over 760 schools of nursing across all 50 states and the District of Columbia. AACN members educate over 425,000 nursing students by utilizing the expertise of nearly 17,000 faculty members. Moreover, AACN institutions graduate and employ many of the profession’s finest leaders who are working to improve America’s health through advancements in education, research, and clinical practice.

Given our mission and the members we represent, AACN commends the vision and intent behind the 21st Century Cures discussion document. Specifically, we would like to comment on the components of the draft that relate to young and emerging scientists, clinical research, as well as provider neutral language to ensure all professionals are included in these solutions.

Title II Building the Foundation for 21st Century Medicine Including Helping Young Scientists
Subtitle A (Section 2001) - 21st Century Cure Consortium Act
Subtitle N (Section 2241) - 21st Century Chronic Disease Initiative Act

AACN applauds the goals of Title II as the provisions are directed to leverage advances in science, technology, and research. Our deans, faculty, and doctoral student members are active participants in the scientific inquiry that improves health care in this country. For decades, nursing science’s impact on improving healthcare delivery has proven far-reaching. Often working collaboratively with physicians and other researchers, nurse scientists are vital in setting the national research agenda. The role of nursing science in healthcare innovation is more critical than ever and directly helps to “aid in the discovery, development, and delivery of the next generation of patient-centered solutions here in the United States.” We appreciate the neutral language included in Subtitle A (Section 2001) - 21st Century Cure Consortium Act, which would include all types of academic researchers as potential representatives appointed to the consortium. The nursing voice could substantially contribute to these dialogues.

Similarly, AACN applauds neutral language to include all academic researchers in Subtitle N (Section 2241) 21st Century Chronic Disease Initiative Act. Nurse researchers make vital contributions through their investigations on ways to prevent, manage, and treat those with chronic illnesses and support their families.

Subtitle K (Section 2181) – Interoperability
Subtitle Q (Section 2301) – Precision Medicine

We look forward to seeing more detailed language regarding interoperability. Since 2009, AACN and many colleagues in the nursing community have supported the federal government’s push
towards a nationwide interoperable health information infrastructure that protects the privacy rights of individuals, improves safety and reliability, all while ensuring cost-effective and coordinated care. This includes: supporting effective collection of standardized, evidence-based performance information that will accurately measure quality and enable transition to a value-based payment system; ensuring that Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs) and Registered Nurses (RNs) are integral leaders and participants in the design, development, implementation, and evaluation of health information technology systems; and ensure that equitable resources, such as incentive payments for implementation, are available and extended to all healthcare professionals, including APRNs and RNs.

Similarly, we look forward to seeing specific language on the precision medicine placeholder. Patient-centered care targeted at the individual should be core to all treatments. Nursing insights are critical to these discussions and discoveries.

Subtitle O (Section 2261-2262) - Helping Young Emerging Scientists

We commend the proposed investments for young emerging scientists. According to AACN, in the last academic year there were 5,145 nursing students in research-focused doctoral programs. These terminal degree programs prepare nursing students to pursue intellectual inquiry and conduct independent research for the purpose of extending knowledge. During their programs, they are prepared to drive change and innovation that will improve health nationally and globally. Like other scientists, competition is intense after these nurse researchers graduate and prepare programs of research as principle investigators.

We believe it is important that emerging scientists with strong research questions have opportunities to build long careers as investigators. Section 2261, clearly denotes that these funds would be available to all institutes and centers, which includes the National Institute of Nursing Research (NINR, National Institutes of Health [NIH]). Research funded at NINR helps to integrate biology and behavior as well as design new technology and tools. NINR’s research fosters advances in nursing practice, improves patient care, works to eliminate health disparities, and attracts new students to the profession. Support for emerging scientists is an investment in the scientific endeavors that will generate new knowledge for better health. AACN is a strong supporter of all institutes and centers at the NIH and hopes that the funding for the agency is sustainable to make the innovations necessary for improving health and quality of life.

Title III - Modernizing Clinical Trails

Subtitle A (Section 3001) - Clinical Research Modernization Act

AACN recognizes the need to streamline the institutional review board process when a study is multi-site with the intent that this will decrease duplication and delays. This could expedite approval processes, decrease administrative burden, and standardize procedures. Whatever efforts are made to do so must not be at the cost of the long negotiated agreements and relationships between sites and foundational understanding of the clinical trials. Clear and structured guidance must be available to protect those involved in the study.

Title IV Subtitle I Telemedicine

Real discussions on access to health cannot occur in the 21st century without thoughtful discussion on the use of technology to aid in the process. The use of telehealth services is increasing and the
research from multiple industries, (i.e. nursing, medicine) has demonstrated their value. A wide range of healthcare providers, such as APRNs and RNs, are engaged in telehealth services. Therefore, we firmly believe the provision should be titled “telehealth” as opposed to telemedicine, to reflect common usage, and to remove any impression that the section refers only to physicians.

Provider Neutral Language
Consistent Use of Provide-Neutral Language

The 21st Century Cures discussion draft is expansive and wide-reaching. In the spirit of full inclusivity and the role that all providers have in improving healthcare delivery, AACN acknowledges and endorses the important use of provider-neutral language throughout. In some instances, however, the language uses the term “physician” when it should also include APRNs and other providers. This change would support and reinforce the reality that the contributions of all providers maximize the patient’s experience and quality of care.

We request that the following instances of “physician” be corrected to “physician or other healthcare providers,” including but not limited to: page 22 line 1; page 84 line 6; page 85 line 11; page 145 lines 12, 13 and 15; page 164 line 2; page 189 line 11; page 315 line 4; page 321 lines 10 and 16; and page 371 line 7.

Again, we commend the movement that has been made on the themes and goals of the 21st Century Cures initiative. We look forward to working with you and your colleagues as the final legislation is drafted. If AACN can be of any assistance, please do not hesitate to contact Dr. Suzanne Miyamoto, AACN’s Senior Director of Government Affairs and Health Policy, at smiyamoto@aacn.nche.edu or 202-463-693, ext. 247.

Sincerely,

[Signature]
Deborah E. Trautman, PhD, RN
Chief Executive Officer

CC:
Ranking Member, Energy and Commerce Committee, Frank Pallone
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