

District of Columbia Nurses Association
Position Statement on
Entry Level Education for Registered Nurses

There is an ongoing debate about raising the entry-level education required to become a Registered Nurse (RN) from an Associate's degree (ADN) to a Bachelor's degree (BSN). At the same time the US Bureau of Labor Statistics expects RN employment to grow 26 percent from 2010 to 2020, faster than the average for all occupations. This growth is expected to create a shortfall of qualified RN's.

It is the position of the District of Columbia Nurses Association (DCNA) that entry to the nursing profession should be based on the candidate's ability to pass the NCLEX exam after completing the requirements of a state approved nursing program, not on what degree they hold.

The current requirement to become a Registered Nurse (RN) is passing the NCLEX exam after completing the requirements of a state approved nursing program (ADN, Diploma, and BSN). All RN candidates take the same exam regardless of education.

The 2012 Healthcare Executive Summary from the Georgetown Public Policy Institute states "Associate's degree holders in nursing pass licensure requirements at approximately the same rate as those holding Bachelor's degrees." Higher degrees are required for advanced and management positions. It is an individual and prudent choice to matriculate at higher levels of nursing for professional growth and advancement as clinical specialists, nurse executives, and educators, to name a few.

The Institute of Medicine 2010 Report states "Nurses should achieve higher levels of education and training through an improved education system that promotes seamless academic progression" and that "to improve the quality of patient care a greater emphasis must be placed on making the nursing workforce more diverse, particularly in the areas of gender, and race/ethnicity."

The Associate's degree is usually less expensive and less time consuming than a Bachelor's degree, allowing more minorities to enter the profession. It usually takes two (2) years to complete an Associate's degree while a Bachelor's degree requires four years to complete. The Associate's degree is an opportunity for any health care worker aspiring to reach for advanced education to embark upon a nursing program that prepares them to become a Registered Nurse. The Associate's degree is affordable and allows for flexibility of matriculation while still remaining employed in the demanding health care arena. Many Associate degree-nursing programs are in Community Colleges. Raising the degree requirement would essentially force closure of these programs, making entry into the profession unaffordable and unattainable for many (especially minorities) which would defeat the goal of a more diverse profession and create a shortage of qualified nurses in the future.

DCNA believes that educating students before college about the nursing profession, requirements and salary will encourage more students to enter the field, but more efforts must be directed toward preparing these young minds, so they can make informed decisions to succeed. Nurses should be encouraged to continue their education once working by accessing partnerships with universities and other educational opportunities as well as scholarships and financial aid.

The number of nursing professors needs to be increased to handle the expected influx of nursing students by making the positions more attractive, adding incentives such as free tuition for professors and/or their children and increased salary. DCNA strongly advocates that student education and awareness can begin in middle school to facilitate an interest in health care and to continue to nurture our future nurses. With sufficient guidance and support, they will, like so many nurses before them, offer excellent healthcare whether they hold a Bachelor's or an Associate's degree.

Citations

Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2012-13 Edition*, Registered Nurses, on the Internet at <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/registered-nurses.htm> (visited March 18, 2013).

Georgetown Public Policy Institute, Center on Education and the Workforce, *Healthcare Executive Summary, June 2012*, on the internet at <http://cew.georgetown.edu/healthcare> (visited March 18, 2013).

Institute of Medicine, *The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health, October, 2010* at <http://iom.edu/Reports/2010/The-Future-of-Nursing-Leading-Change-Advancing-Health.aspx> (visited March 18, 2013).