

# Position Statement

## **THE PREPARATION OF NURSE EDUCATORS**

NLN Board of Governors  
May 18, 2002

To ensure an adequate supply of competent nurse educators, the National League for Nursing strongly urges the nursing education community to engage in an immediate and focused effort to provide increased opportunities in graduate programs to prepare faculty and to provide greater support for faculty development activities. The National League for Nursing also strongly advocates that careers in nursing education be promoted vigorously to talented neophytes and experienced nurses who have already demonstrated nurse educator skills, and that funding to support the preparation of nurse educators and the development of the science of nursing education be increased significantly.

In light of the looming crisis in the supply of faculty to teach in schools of nursing, the time has come for the nursing profession to outline a preferred future for the preparation of nurse educators. This crisis must be used as an opportunity to recruit qualified individuals to the educator role, to ensure that these individuals are appropriately prepared for the responsibilities they will assume as faculty and staff development educators, and to implement strategies that will serve to retain a qualified nurse educator workforce.

The National League for Nursing asserts that the nurse educator role requires specialized preparation and every individual engaged in the academic enterprise must be prepared to implement that role successfully. In addition, each academic unit in nursing must have a cadre of experts in nursing education who provide the leadership needed to advance nursing education, conduct pedagogical research, and contribute to the ongoing development of the science of nursing education.

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## **BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE**

Nurse educators are the key resource in preparing a nursing workforce that will provide quality care to meet the health care needs of our population. They practice in academic and clinical settings, and they must be competent clinicians. However, while being a good clinician is essential, it is not sufficient for the educator role.

Regardless of the setting in which the nurse educator is employed, there is a core of knowledge and skills that is essential if one is to be effective and achieve excellence in the role. That core of knowledge and skills entails the ability to facilitate learning, advance the total development and professional socialization of the learner, design appropriate learning experiences, and evaluate learning outcomes.

There is an urgent concern, however, about the number of faculty available to teach in our nursing programs and the extent to which those individuals have been adequately prepared for the role. At present, there are approximately 3,500 nursing programs (practical nurse, associate degree, diploma, baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral), "housed" in nearly 2,500 schools of nursing. These schools enroll a total of approximately 300,000 students. With the projected "shortfall" of nurses to meet the health care needs of our increasingly diverse and aging population, schools may need to increase their enrollments by as much as one-third to "fill the gap," bringing the ideal number of enrolled students close to 400,000.

Using a ratio of 10:1 (students:full-time faculty member), the number of full-time faculty required to teach those 400,000 students enrolled in today's 3,500 programs may be as high as 40,000. Current data suggest we now have less than 50% of that number, and the supply of individuals available to meet this demand is shrinking rapidly as the result of three phenomena: the retirement of large numbers of faculty (many of whom were prepared as educators), the limited number of graduate programs that offer options to specialize in nursing education, and the declining enrollments in graduate programs that are designed to prepare nurse educators.

Between 1993 and 1999, the number of students enrolled in master's programs designed to prepare them for a faculty role fell from 3,026 (9.9% of the total of those enrolled) to 1,229 (4% of all those enrolled). During that same period, the number of individuals who were graduated with a master's specialization in nursing education fell from 755 (9.5% of all graduates) to 247, a mere 2.5% of all those being graduated.

In addition, the supply of doctorally-prepared faculty has not kept pace with program demands. In 1993, there were 54 doctoral programs in nursing. That year saw 2,751 students enrolled in and 381 individuals graduated from those 54 programs. In 1999, the number of programs increased by 33% to 72, and the number of enrolled students increased by 22% to 3,359. However, the number of students graduating from doctoral programs in nursing in 1999 decreased by nearly 2% to only 375.

Does this suggest that we should no longer prepare clinical specialists or advanced practice nurses in master's programs? No. However it does suggest that there should be increased opportunities for nurses to pursue preparation as educators, particularly since many graduates of master's and doctoral programs assume such a role upon graduation, either in an academic or a service setting.

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Does this suggest that nurse educators do not need to be competent clinicians? No. However, it does suggest that more attention needs to be given to the teaching/pedagogical component of the role. It is critical that all nurse educators know about teaching, learning and evaluation; and nurse educators who practice in academic settings also must have knowledge and skill in curriculum development, assessment of program outcomes, and being an effective member of an academic community, among other things. Additionally, each academic unit in nursing must have a cadre of experts/"architects"/designers/leaders who can envision new realities for nursing education, generate new models of education, and create new pedagogies and new futures for nursing education.

Does all this suggest that we should ignore the research requirements established in many institutions for academic appointment, promotion and tenure? No. However, it does suggest that the academic community should not assume that individuals are qualified to teach simply because they hold a particular credential (i.e., master's degree or doctorate) and have expertise in a particular area (whether that be nursing, statistics, or any other field). The academic community also should not assume that individuals learn to be teachers, advisors, curriculum developers, and educational leaders through "on-the-job training" or "trial by fire," rather than through planned, deliberate preparation for such roles and responsibilities. The concepts of *excellence as a teacher* or *excellence as a faculty member* must be discussed more often in the academic community, and more attention must be given to the ongoing development of faculty as educators.

Does all this suggest that we should cease, reduce, or minimize the importance of developing the science of nursing and the scientific basis for nursing practice? No. Given that nursing is a practice profession, that the body of nursing knowledge is relatively young in its development and that concerted efforts are needed if a science is to mature, efforts to develop the science of nursing must continue. However, more attention needs to be given to developing the science of nursing education. The teaching of nursing must be evidence-based, with research informing what is taught, how learning is facilitated and evaluated, and how curricula/programs are designed. Additionally, educators whose area of scholarship is pedagogical, rather than clinical, in nature should be encouraged, supported, and rewarded for this contribution. These expert educator/scholars have a responsibility for contributing to the ongoing development, utilization, and dissemination of the science of nursing education, a contribution that is essential to the continued development and refinement of the educator role and the development of the discipline itself.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The nurse educator role is essential to the ongoing development of the profession and the ability of the discipline to meet society's needs for quality nursing care.

There is specialized knowledge and preparation that is essential for practice as a nurse educator, and that knowledge and skill must be recognized and rewarded by the nursing and higher education communities.

Competence as an educator can be established, recognized, and expanded through master's and/or doctoral education, post-master's certificate programs, continuing professional development, mentoring activities, and professional certification as a faculty member.

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Since educators are accountable to the discipline, to students, and to the public for the outcomes of nursing education, they must engage in lifelong learning activities to maintain and expand their expertise in this role.

Schools of nursing can demonstrate their commitment to excellence in nursing education by offering master's, post-master's, or doctoral programs that prepare nurse educators. Schools that offer such options are to be commended, supported, and rewarded.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

In recognition of these factors, in light of the current and anticipated shortage of qualified faculty and in accord with its mission to advance quality nursing education, the National League for Nursing recommends the following and wishes to partner with schools to turn these visions into reality.

### Recommendations for Individual Nurses and Faculty:

- Nurses should seek out and take advantage of opportunities that prepare them for a nurse educator role
- Faculty should promote careers in nursing education through the early identification of talented neophytes and the encouragement of experienced nurses who have demonstrated nurse educator skills
- Senior faculty who, themselves, are expert educators should mentor novices and foster their professional growth in the role
- Faculty should partner with colleagues in other disciplines to explore the implementation and implications of a heightened focus on educational excellence, pedagogical research and innovative program design

### Recommendations for Program Development/Direction:

- Some master's programs should develop or re-instate a track that prepares beginning nurse educators (for full-time faculty roles in community colleges, part-time or non-tenure-track positions in universities, or staff development positions in the practice setting) or that help advanced clinicians make the transition to the role of educator
- Doctoral programs should include learning experiences related to teaching and learning for all students
- Some doctoral programs should offer an option that allows students to specialize in nursing education and conduct pedagogical research, thereby contributing significantly to the development of a strong cadre of expert faculty-scholars who will assume leadership roles in nursing education and contribute to the ongoing development of the science of nursing education

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Recommendation for Program Deans/Directors/Chairpersons:

- Schools of nursing should create innovative ways in which "emeritus" or retired faculty with expertise as educators can continue to contribute to the academic enterprise, including the development of faculty
- Schools of nursing should support lifelong learning activities that help educators maintain and expand their expertise in teaching and education, as well as their clinical competence and their scholarly skills
- Schools of nursing should recognize and reward faculty who are expert educators
- Schools of nursing should provide financial, workload reduction, graduate assistant, and other types of support to help educators develop their teaching/ advisement/program development skills
- Faculty should be encouraged and supported to participate in faculty development programs that focus on teaching and education, just as they are encouraged and supported to participate in programs that focus on their clinical specialty area or research
- Deans/Directors/Chairpersons should view participation in education-focused conferences as critical to the success of an academic or staff development program, and promote/support faculty attendance at such conferences
- Schools of nursing should reward educators for their contributions to designing innovative curricula or developing creative approaches that facilitate learning

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