



For Immediate Release

Schools of Nursing Nationwide Move to Transform Baccalaureate Education in Response to Patient Care Needs and the Changing Nature of the Registered Nurse Role

WASHINGTON, DC, October 30, 2008 – As the national voice for baccalaureate and graduate nursing education, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) is pleased to announce the endorsement of a new set of competency standards that will enhance the ability of baccalaureate-prepared nurses to provide safe, high quality patient care. At AACN’s Fall Semiannual Meeting held October 20, 2008, deans and directors from the nation’s senior schools of nursing voted to endorse *The Essentials of Baccalaureate Education for Professional Nursing Practice*, a re-envisioning of the previous *Baccalaureate Essentials* issued in 1998. The revised document was developed through a national consensus-building process and will have a significant impact on how professional nurses are prepared for contemporary nursing practice.

“Nursing’s academic leaders have taken a bold step forward in their work to transform baccalaureate education and enhance the preparation of new nurse graduates,” said AACN President Fay Raines. “Nursing practice has changed substantially over the past 10 years, and nurse educators are working to evolve their baccalaureate programs to prepare today’s nurses with the knowledge and skills needed to provide the best care possible to patients.”

The new *Baccalaureate Essentials* meet the Institute of Medicine’s recommendations for the core knowledge needed for all healthcare professionals. Due to the ever-changing and complex healthcare environment, this document emphasizes such concepts as patient-centered care, interprofessional teams, evidence-based practice, quality improvement, patient safety, informatics, clinical reasoning/critical thinking, genetics and genomics, cultural sensitivity, professionalism, lifespan, and end-of-life care. These *Essentials* apply to all pre-licensure and degree-completion programs, whether the degree is baccalaureate or graduate entry.

The nine *Essentials* delineated in the document underscore the importance of the following themes which are fundamental to baccalaureate nursing education:

- A solid base in liberal education provides the cornerstone for the practice and education of nurses.
- In order to provide high-quality health care, knowledge and skills in leadership, communication, quality improvement, and patient safety are necessary.
- Professional nursing practice is grounded in the analysis and application of evidence for practice.

- Knowledge and skills in information and patient care technology are critical in the delivery of quality patient care.
- Healthcare policies, including financial and regulatory, directly and indirectly influence the nature and functioning of the healthcare system.
- Collaboration among healthcare professionals is critical to delivering high quality and safe patient care.
- Health promotion and disease prevention at the individual and population levels are necessary to improve population health.
- Professionalism is fundamental to the discipline of nursing.
- Integration of knowledge and skills is critical to practice. Practice occurs across the lifespan and in the continuum of healthcare environments. The baccalaureate graduate demonstrates clinical reasoning within the context of patient-centered care to form the basis for nursing practice that reflects ethical values.

In 2006, the AACN Board of Directors established the **Task Force on the Revision of the *Essentials of Baccalaureate Education for Professional Nursing Practice*** to update the 1998 *Essentials* document. Chaired by Dr. Patricia Martin from Wright State University, the task force was comprised of experts in baccalaureate nursing education, including deans and faculty, as well as a chief nurse executive from the practice community. During an 18-month consensus-building process, the task force convened stakeholders' meetings with healthcare leaders to identify the anticipated role of the professional nurse in the future and the critical competencies needed to function in this role; hosted a series of five regional meetings to gather feedback and seek agreement about the *Essentials*; and actively sought input from a variety of national nursing organizations, including the American Organization of Nurse Executives and Sigma Theta Tau International. On July 19, 2008, the AACN Board unanimously approved the revised *Essentials* document which was endorsed by AACN members in October 2008.

The Essentials of Baccalaureate Education for Professional Nursing Practice may be downloaded online at <http://www.aacn.nche.edu/Education/pdf/BaccEssentials08.pdf>. The AACN task force is developing an online tool kit for nursing faculty which will help to integrate the new *Essentials* into baccalaureate curriculum. This tool kit will be posted on the AACN Web site by January 2009.

The Growing Need for Baccalaureate-Prepared Nurses

The update of the *Baccalaureate Essentials* comes at a time when the need for a more highly educated nursing workforce is becoming a national priority. Professional registered nurses are integral to protecting patient safety and providing quality health care. In a report release by the Institute of Medicine in 2004, an expert committee of leading health professionals found that “how we are cared for by nurses affects our health, and sometimes can be a matter of life and death ... nurses are indispensable to our safety.” This finding has been confirmed by subsequent studies which show that nurses are much more likely than any other health professional to recognize and correct errors that are often life threatening; that inadequate nurse staffing levels may lead to a higher incidence of complications and inadequate care; and that a higher percentage of baccalaureate-prepared nurses in hospital settings reduce mortality and failure to

rescue rates.

Evidence continues to mount indicating that baccalaureate-prepared nurses are critical to improving patient outcomes. In a recent article published in the August 2008 issue of *Health Services Research*, Dr. Christopher Friese and his colleagues recommend that “moving to a nurse workforce in which a higher proportion of staff nurses have at least a baccalaureate-level education would result in substantially fewer adverse outcomes for patients.” In the May 2008 *Journal of Nursing Administration*, Dr. Linda Aiken and her colleagues confirmed earlier research findings from a 2003 study which show a strong link between nurse education level and patient outcomes. The noted nurse researcher found that every 10% increase in the proportion of baccalaureate-prepared nurses on the hospital staff was associated with a 4% decrease in the risk of death. These studies, coupled with other conducted in the U.S. and Canada, indicate a clear connection between higher levels of nursing education and better patient outcomes.

“Quality patient care hinges on having a well-educated nursing workforce,” added Dr. Raines. “AACN is committed to working collaboratively with the education and healthcare communities to create a highly educated nursing workforce able to meet the expectations of today’s nurse. We strongly believe that encouraging all nurses to advance their education is in the best interest of patients and an important step toward enhancing patient safety.”

For more information on research related to baccalaureate-prepared nurses and efforts to move nurses along the educational continuum, see AACN’s fact sheet on *The Impact of Education on Nursing Practice*: <http://www.aacn.nche.edu/Media/FactSheets/ImpactEdNP.htm>.

The American Association of Colleges of Nursing is the national voice for university and four-year-college education programs in nursing. Representing more than 630 member schools of nursing at public and private institutions nationwide, AACN's educational, research, governmental advocacy, data collection, publications, and other programs work to establish quality standards for bachelor's- and graduate-degree nursing education, assist deans and directors to implement those standards, influence the nursing profession to improve health care, and promote public support of baccalaureate and graduate nursing education, research, and practice. See <http://www.aacn.nche.edu>.

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