

ABOUT HEALTHCARE APPRENTICESHIPS

As communities and healthcare settings across the United States experience difficulties in recruiting and retaining nurses, many are searching for innovative solutions to fill workforce gaps. One option explored and implemented by some states is the concept of “nurse apprenticeships.”

In general, apprenticeships are understood to provide “on the job” training in addition to education to prepare individuals to participate in a skilled trade. Often, apprenticeships emphasize on-the-job training before formal education is complete. According to the State of Oregon, an apprenticeable occupation means a skilled trade that:

- a) Is customarily learned in a practical way through a structured, systematic program of on-the-job supervised training;
- b) Is clearly identified and commonly recognized throughout the industry;
- c) Involves manual, mechanical or technical skills and knowledge that require a minimum of 2,000 hours of on-the-job supervised training; and
- d) Required related instruction to supplement the on-the-job training.ⁱ

Apprenticeships in healthcare are not a new idea. The U.S. Department of Labor provides several examples of high-demand apprenticeship occupations, including dental assistants, emergency medical technicians, nurse aides, paramedics, and more.ⁱⁱ Following these models and faced with the need to fill nursing positions in critical areas, healthcare leaders across the nation are applying the standards of apprenticeship to registered nursing.

OBJECTIONS TO NURSING APPRENTICESHIPS

While education is a component of an apprenticeship, the value of the concept is the ability for a worker to prove competency through supervised work experience. Over many decades, the nursing profession has worked to move the industry from technical, skilled training models to a profession with education competency standards. While nurses once received education through diploma programs associated with hospitals or religious organizations, nurses of today receive associate and baccalaureate degrees from licensed and accredited higher education institutions. This higher standard allows nurses to better advocate for patients, and provide better care.

Nurse leaders, who have devoted their lives to improve patient outcomes through quality nursing practice, might object to implementing apprenticeship programs for registered nurses, as this could appear to be a “step back” from the progress made. In fact, professional nursing organizations advocate for more education, not less. Since the 1960s, the American Nurses Association has recommended the baccalaureate of nursing degree for entry-to-practice, along with passing the National Licensing Exam.ⁱⁱⁱ

Nurses in the 21st century graduate from accredited education programs and receive a license before they enter practice. To apply an apprenticeship model to registered nursing requires a reinterpretation of the understanding of “apprenticeship.”

ABOUT HEALTHCARE APPRENTICESHIPS

In some parts of the nation, healthcare systems are using a reinvented type of apprenticeship to nursing. These interpretations are applied to both pre-licensure nursing students, and post-licensure nurses.

Pre-licensure Apprenticeship Models

Currently, there is only one health system in the United States offering apprenticeships for nursing students (pre-licensure).

Kentucky: Norton Healthcare

The Student Nurse Apprenticeship Program (SNAP) is an opportunity for student nurses in their junior year of a BSN program, or who have completed one term of an ADN program, to pursue the clinical experience required as part of their education as an employee of Norton Healthcare. The program lasts 12 – 18 months and focuses on “reinforcing nursing education and patient safety, awareness of the professional nurse role, and an appreciation of organization structures and operations with a leading health care setting.”^{iv}

Post-licensure Apprenticeship Models

There are post-graduate opportunities that fit within an expanded definition of apprenticeship, and some organizations are currently pursuing these models.

Nurse Residencies

New nurse graduates, and nurses who are switching practice settings, can benefit from a nurse “residency.” There is no standard definition of a nurse residency, but in essence, a nurse residency is “a program entered into only after graduation from a nursing program that is more formal or structured than basic new nurse orientation.”^v These residencies can last from three to 12 months long and include classroom education with assigned mentor or preceptor.

Connecticut: Yale New Haven Hospital

The Yale New Haven Hospital began a Nurse Residency Program in 2005. In 2017, the hospital received a grant through the US Department of Labor’s *American Apprenticeship Initiative* and adapted their existing program to become the Nurse Residency Apprenticeship Program. In the current program, nurses participate in on-the-job learning with related instruction, online training, and mentoring. The Connecticut Department of Labor Office of Apprenticeship Training registers nurse residents/apprentices.^{vi}

RN to BSN Training

Nurses receive education either through an accredited associate (ADN) or baccalaureate (BSN) degree program. Upon completion of the program, nursing students take the Nursing Certification and Licensing Exam (NCLEX), and become registered nurses after passing the test. Nurses across the country can practice with either an ADN or a BSN degree.

In 2010, the National Academy of Medicine (formerly called the Institute of Medicine) released “The Future of Nursing” report, calling on leaders to advance the nursing profession to better adapt to changing healthcare policy. This report, championed by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the AARP, calls on nurses to increase their education, and recommends 80 percent of all nurses in the US have a BSN degree by 2020.^{vii} One system utilizes apprenticeship models to encourage nurses with ADN degrees to return to school and to obtain a BSN degree (RN to BSN).

Minnesota: Fairview Health Systems

Fairview has created an RN to BSN pathway to allow current licensed employees obtain their BSN. To do this, Fairview has partnered with about 24 RN to BSN programs across the country. This program is registered as an apprenticeship with the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry, and received federal apprenticeship funds for their program. “By early 2018, Fairview had 122 nurse apprentices enrolled, making it one of the largest single-employer apprenticeship programs in the country.”^{viii}

GOING FORWARD

The need to recruit nurses in rural communities and certain practice settings is real, and innovative solutions should be encouraged. The US Department of Labor has allocated resources to promote apprenticeships, particularly in healthcare. There is an opportunity to pursue building up the nursing workforce in Oregon using the momentum of apprenticeships.

The connotation of the word “apprenticeship” often implies technical rather than professional education. Facilitators and policy-makers interested in developing work-based learning models for nursing should take care to ensure those models do not demote the professionalism and educational standards of nurses in Oregon.

Partners and leaders in government agencies, nursing organizations, and employers of nurses should continue to engage in discussion to determine the best way to leverage apprenticeship funding and existing models to promote nurse residencies and enhance educational progression in our state.

References

- ⁱ2017 Oregon Revised Statutes 660.010. Available at <https://www.oregonlaws.org/ors/660.010>
- ⁱⁱUnited States Department of Labor. Apprenticeship: The Workforce Solution for the Healthcare Industry. Retrieved on March 18, 2019 from <https://www.dol.gov/apprenticeship/industry/healthcare.htm>
- ⁱⁱⁱCommittee on Nursing Education, American Nurses Association (1965, December). American Nurses Association's first position on education for nursing. *American Journal of Nursing*; 65(12), 106-107.
- ^{iv}Norton Healthcare. Student Nurse Apprenticeship Program. Retrieved on March 18, 2019 from <https://nortonhealthcare.com/careers/career-areas/nursing/apprenticeship>
- ^vStokowski, Laura A (2019, July 15). Nurse Residency Programs: Rolling Out the Welcome Mat. *Medscape*. Retrieved from https://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/848039_4
- ^{vi}Yale New Haven Health. (2017, November 16). *Yale New Haven Hospital recognized for its registered apprenticeship program for new nurse hires*. [Press Release]. Retrieved from <https://www.ynhh.org/News/2017/11/YNHH-recognized-for-its-registered-apprenticeship-program-for-new-nurse-hires.aspx>
- ^{vii}Institute of Medicine. (2010). The future of nursing: Leading change, advancing health. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/24983041>
- ^{viii}Love, I & McCarthy, M. A. (2018, September 6). *Apprenticeship and the Future of Nursing*. Retrieved from New America website: <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/reports/apprenticeship-and-future-nursing/>