

THE BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN NURSING AT ILLINOIS COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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Health care providers are constantly looking to deliver the best possible care to their patients. One of the key changes health care providers are implementing is improving the education of their workforce. In 2010, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) released a report, *The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health*, and set an ambitious goal: increasing the proportion of nurses with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) from 50 to 80 percent by 2020. This has commonly been referred to as the “80/20 Nursing Initiative” or the “BSN in Ten.”

More specifically, the recommendation requires graduates from associate degree nursing programs to continue their education and acquire a BSN within ten years. Studies have shown increased nursing education positively impacts a range of healthcare issues, including fewer patient falls, better surgical outcomes, and a decrease in the rate of “failure to rescue” events. Additionally, nursing staffs with a higher percentage of BSNs are correlated with better mortality outcomes for patients.

The IOM’s recommendation was bold considering two-thirds of new nurses still graduated with less than a BSN. This was despite numerous reports and commissions recommending the BSN as the entry qualification for professional nurses. Further, when the IOM report was issued, only about 49% of nurses held a BSN. The recommendation, however, became a tipping point to mobilize responses from stakeholders to demand a change, most notably from employers. Market forces are in greater alignment than ever before to support transition to a BSN-qualified nurse workforce in the United States.

Demand

Additional education is not only a pathway to a brighter future in the profession, but is steadily becoming a requirement. Employers have become engaged in meaningful ways, taking actions to become a largely BSN workforce, through preferential hiring of BSN-qualified nurses and support of their employees to pursue RN to BSN education. The Organization for Associate Degree Nursing (OADM) published a position statement in 2014 committing to partner with stakeholders in supporting and adopting strategies to achieve the 80/20 Nursing Initiative. In its statement, OADM sought to identify the scope of the demand according to 2013 statistics:

- Approximately 44% of hospitals and other health care settings require new employees to have a BSN.
- 78.6% of employers express a strong preference for BSN-prepared nurses.

In upholding this demand, Magnet-designated hospitals and health care systems must now demonstrate evidence of a plan to increase BSN-prepared nurses to 80% by 2020.

Supply

Unfortunately, a potential complicating factor in meeting the IOM recommendation is the registered nurse workforce projections. The Bureau of Labor Statistics has projected that 555,100 registered nurses (RNs) and advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs) will retire between 2012 and 2022, and the demand for nurses will create 574,400 additional jobs for RNs and APRNs. The combination of those two forces will generate 1.13 million vacancies for RNs and APRNs between 2012 and 2022. The vacancies, in turn, will create a need for additional faculty and classroom space to meet the demand.

A national trend evidences a lack of institutional capacity to educate qualified nursing students. The same trend can be seen in Illinois. According to the Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation, in 2011, 2012, and 2013, there were 52%, 46%, and 44% respectively of qualified applicants turned away from BSN programs due to lack of capacity.

BSN Degree Awarded from a Community College

Seamless academic progression is the stated goal of many stakeholders. Several promising models are in place to fill the gap, and each is based on strong partnerships and close collaboration between community colleges and universities. Illinois already utilizes the University Partnership Model, wherein after 4 years, a student will graduate with an ADN conferred by the community college and a BSN conferred by the university. On its own, this model is not enough to meet the goal.

Another way RNs could achieve BSNs has been through access to proprietary online degree programs. If extra education seems daunting to nurses already burdened with a hectic life, the flexibility of online education allows students to complete coursework at times most convenient for their professional and personal lives.

The RN to BSN degree model offers nurses the opportunity to continue their post-licensure education in a community college setting and receive a BSN degree. AD nurses with an RN license can advance directly to obtaining a BSN degree through the community college. This model especially benefits place-bound nurses that have limited access to other options in their area, and it is more affordable than the online proprietary degree programs non-traditional students currently choose. The RN to BSN programs at community colleges would be nationally accredited, transferable degrees that prepare the graduates to further their education.

In 2005, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) examined the issue of community colleges conferring baccalaureate degrees in areas of high need, including nursing. The AACN composed a position statement Baccalaureate Nursing Programs Offered by Community Colleges. The statement supports efforts to expand the availability of BSN programs and increase the number of BSN-prepared nurses nationwide. It also highlights the process required to transition from an institution that grants associate degrees to an institution capable of granting baccalaureate degree, including accreditation reviews and a charge to design these programs using the competencies outlined in AACN's publication *The Essentials of Baccalaureate Education for Professional Nursing Practice*.