Associate degree nursing: The national perspective

By Donna Spivey

Nursing education is entering a new, dynamic period. As a nursing educator and a leader at a community college for many years, the importance of a community college and the impact it plays is demonstrated with each graduate that crosses the stage.

Community colleges have assisted in bridging the gap and assisted in meeting the needs of underserved and diverse students. Associate degree nursing (ADN) programs graduate more African American, Latino and Native American registered nurses than other types of prelicensure nursing programs, according to data from the Campaign for Action. In addition, these nursing graduates most often choose to stay in their community and work. These graduates know, understand and embrace the needs of their community, and they personally benefit from the decreased cost in tuition and length of the program.

SEAMLESS TRANSITIONS

Community colleges play a crucial role in educating individuals who desire to become a nurse. Registered nursing graduates with an associate degree also are choosing to continue their education and acquire additional skills and competencies that will serve their communities. Community colleges are working diligently to ensure a seamless plan for transitioning to higher degrees in nursing. Whether it be a baccalaureate program at the community college, dual admission, concurrent enrollment or RN-to-BSN program, the key is seamless transition.

Removing the barriers to ensure students continue the learning momentum is something we must stress as community college leaders.

Most recently, Donna Meyer, CEO of the Organization for Associate Degree Nursing (OADN), had the opportunity to testify to the National Academy of Medicine on the future of nursing for 2020-2030. This represented the only testimony to this blue-ribbon national commission exclusively focused on the contributions of community colleges to the national nursing workforce.

Over the years, OADN—an affiliate council of the American Association of Community Colleges—has been at the forefront and involved in the transformation of nursing education. The community-based institutions that OADN represents educate more than 50 percent of all newly licensed professional registered nurses, an average of 81,000 annually, according to the national Council of State Boards of Nursing. Close collaboration with prominent national healthcare organizations ensures that the interests of associate degree nursing programs are represented in national policy decision making.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), for example, now officially cites the value and important role a community college plays in educating the workforce, noting the capacity to provide individuals with the ability to launch careers, setting them on path to achieve goals, and helping our nation meet access needs for an aging and chronically ill population.

As an ADN graduate myself, I can tell you that without the opportunity to enter nursing through a community college pathway, I am not certain I would be here writing to you today as a dean of nursing at Houston Community College's Coleman College for Health Sciences. I am thankful and very grateful for the community college I attended so many years ago. The foundation in nursing I received, as well as so many others, is a proud accomplishment upon which we all continue to build. The future of nursing education is bright and one with much excitement. We are encouraged to embrace education, tear down the walls in academics and come together to educate the nation's future nurses. The ADN will remain a strong and much needed component of nursing education moving forward.

AACC members can contact OADN with questions or concerns on these topics. We will continue to progress together, in our shared spirit of collaboration and innovation. Visit *www.OADN.org* for more information. ∎

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