

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Initiative on the Future of Nursing, at the Institute of Medicine

As the nation looks to make fundamental reforms to health care in order to address the increasing number of uninsured Americans and provide high quality, affordable care to an aging population, there is a unique opportunity to provide information, insight, and guidance on the future role of nursing in the delivery of that care. A transformation of the nursing profession will be required in any fundamental health care reform.

Nurses provide front-line services that are at the heart of our nation's health care. Over two million strong, they are the largest segment of the health care workforce. Nurses are essential to the provision of quality care: they are the professionals most likely to intercept medical errors. The future of health care is closely tied to the future of nursing, and it is critical to ensure that the nursing workforce has the capacity in numbers and skill competencies to meet present and future needs.

Nursing faces a number of challenges that must be overcome to fulfill the promise of health care reform and meet the nation's health needs. The current and projected shortage of nurses poses a severe threat to the adequacy and safety of health care in the United States. A shortage of educational opportunities for nursing, driven by a faculty shortage, is making it difficult to meet the increasing demand for nurses. Technological changes create a growing need for nurse training and post-licensure competence.

It is essential to identify new solutions for nursing in areas of recruitment, education, retention and new technologies; in the delivery of nursing services in a variety of care settings; and in the context of the entire health care work force. As health care reform progresses, the nursing profession must contribute solutions and play a central part in the reform process.

As such, The Institute of Medicine (IOM) in collaboration with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) will establish a major initiative on the future of nursing. The initial cornerstone of the program will be a major study that will produce a transformational report on the future of nursing.

The IOM committee will define a clear agenda and blueprint for action including changes in public and institutional policies at the national, state, and local levels. The committee's recommendations will address a range of system changes, including innovative ways to improve health care quality and address the nursing shortage in the United States. Recommendations may relate to the following issues, with the goal of identifying vital roles for nurses in designing and implementing a more effective and efficient health care system:

- Reconceptualizing the role of nurses within the context of the entire workforce, the shortage, societal issues, and current and future technology;
- Expanding nursing faculty, increasing the capacity of nursing schools, and redesigning nursing education to assure that it can produce an adequate number of well prepared nurses able to meet current and future health care demands;
- Examining innovative solutions related to care delivery and health professional education with a focus on nursing and the delivery of nursing services;
- Attracting and retaining well prepared nurses in multiple care settings, including acute, ambulatory, primary care, long term care, community, and public health.

The initiative is sponsored by RWJF and will be conducted within the IOM Executive Office. The first 13 months of the two-year initiative will involve information gathering, preparation of the consensus report and summaries of the regional forums. Three regional forums, as well as two technical or policy-oriented workshops will provide input to the study committee. The report will be the basis for extensive communication work by the RWJF, in collaborative with the IOM. Near the end of the two-year period, the RWJF and the IOM will sponsor a national conference to discuss the issues raised by these activities.

Target audiences for the Initiative will include national policymakers, state and local government leaders, advocacy organizations, professional societies - both nursing and others, licensing bodies, educational institutions, education researchers, and individuals who are considering careers in nursing.