

Wisconsin Nurses Association

Requirements for Demonstrating Continued Competence for Registered Nurses

Summary: The issue of requiring continuing education as a condition of RN licensure has been brought to the attention of WNA by legislators, nurses and other health care professionals. Support for mandatory continuing education has increased in the legislature as it is viewed as a means of assuring the public that practitioners are competent to practice. In Wisconsin, mandatory continuing education as a condition of licensure exists for the majority of health care professionals except for nursing. Wisconsin's Board of Nursing does mandate continuing education as part of Discipline Orders for those nurses violating the Nurse Practice Act.

According to the report issued by Taft & Kisting Sparks in 2007 (Carter, 2008), a 1980 meta-analysis revealed that continuing education positively affects nursing practice with an "effect size = 0.73". There were 34 research studies included in the meta-analysis. What was not determined was, if the degree of positive affect was greater or lesser or the same if the continuing education was mandatory or voluntary. The Taft & Kisting Sparks report also provided a summary of the pros and cons to mandatory continuing education. The results are as follows:

Pros

- Demonstrates professionalism
- Demonstrates commitment to maintaining competence
- Demonstrates attention to patient safety and a reduction in medical errors
- Motivates employers to support continuing education needs of RN employees
- Raises the standard for continuing education for all nurses
- Research supports the conclusion that continuing education positively affects nursing practice.

Cons

- Seat time doesn't guarantee learning
- Difficult to agree on competency standards
- Administrative and monitoring costs
- Concerns about the cost, access, quality and relevance of CE offerings
- Research inconclusive about the benefits of *mandatory* continuing education over *voluntary* continuing education
- Difficult to measure outcomes of mandatory continuing education on patient care due to the many variables that influence patient outcomes. Influencing variables include, the individual nurse, the choice of the continuing education program, the continuing education program itself, learning styles, professionalism, and accountability.

In addition, the 2007 report, provided insight into a need for legislators, regulators and the nursing profession to not view continuing education as the only possible of means demonstrating nurse competence. Currently, there are a number of discussions among several national groups related to demonstrating and measuring competence. Such groups include the American Nurses Credentialing Center, National Council of State Boards of Nursing, ANA Congress on Nursing Practice & Economics, Institute of Medicine and the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Health Care Organizations. What is emerging from all of these groups is the recognition that there are a variety of approaches to measuring and demonstrating competence and competencies. Taft & Kisting Sparks reported on some of the approaches that currently exist including hours per year of practice, continuing education, college credit, research & publication, specialty certification and reflective practice.

The WNA Education Council submitted recommendations regarding mandatory continuing education and continued competence of RNs to the WNA Board of Directors. These recommendations were accepted February 2008 and are used as the basis for the recommendations in this proposal.

Recommendations: That the Wisconsin Nurses Association:

- 1. Support required activities that ensure continued competence for registered nurses.**
- 2. Support multiple approaches to demonstrating continued competence. Examples include:**
 - **Hours of practice per year requirement**
 - **Relevant college credit**
 - **Certification in a nursing specialty**
 - **Teaching in a nursing program**
 - **Nursing research**
 - **Publication in a peer-reviewed journal**
 - **Continuing education**

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