

Wisconsin Nurses Association
Educational Advancement for Registered Nurses

Summary: This action report recommends increasing the preferred level of education for continued practice as a registered nurse by recommending that all registered nurses in Wisconsin attain a baccalaureate degree nursing within ten years of initial licensure, recognizing the multiple entry points into the profession. The purpose of this recommendation is to be responsive to the increasingly complex health care needs of the residents of Wisconsin.

A strong foundation in the liberal arts and sciences strengthens those analytical and critical thinking skills which are needed for safe, culturally competent care. These skills, further developed through baccalaureate programs, better prepare registered nurses to seek process improvements addressing medical errors and other challenges in the healthcare delivery system. In a recent report to the US Department of Health and Human services, The National Advisory Council on Nurse Education and Practice urged that two-thirds of the basic nurse workforce hold baccalaureate or higher degrees in nursing by 2010. Numerous options, including accelerated RN/BS programs, distance learning programs, on-line degree programs and “college” at work-site programs, now exist for registered nurses to more easily achieve a baccalaureate degree. The cost of these programs, however, is often a barrier.

The current shortage of nursing faculty is a serious barrier to increasing the number of practicing registered nurses. Many schools of nursing have waiting lists of potential students. Encouraging and facilitating all registered nurses in Wisconsin to achieve baccalaureate degrees will significantly enlarge the pool of individuals who might then seek the advanced degrees needed to become nursing faculty.

The achievement of a baccalaureate degree increases and expands the career opportunities for a registered nurse.

This report updates previous Wisconsin Nurses Association positions regarding the recommended level of educational preparation for ongoing nursing practice and is consistent with the Association’s commitment to encouraging continued learning to maintain professional competency.

Recommendations: That the Wisconsin Nurses Association:

- 1. Affirm that increased numbers of nurses with a baccalaureate degree in nursing are needed to address the ongoing challenges of an increasingly complex health care delivery system and a critical nursing faculty shortage; and**
- 2. Will assume leadership role in developing initiatives (improved articulation agreements between ADN and BSN programs, scholarships and loan forgiveness programs, etc.) that encourage registered nurses in Wisconsin to obtain a baccalaureate degree in nursing within 10 years of initial licensure; and**
- 3. Advocate for and promote legislative and education activities and programs that support registered nurses who pursue advanced degrees in nursing.**