



President's Message

Registered nurses in primary care: A value proposition



Bobbie Berkowitz, PhD, RN, NEA-BC, FAAN

I feel as if we are finally acting on evidence that has been known for some time; there is significant value to enhancing the contributions of registered nurses practicing in primary care. The outcome of increased efforts to engage RNs in primary care practice could be gains in the health status of patients, reduced dissatisfaction of providers (physicians, nurse practitioners, and physician assistants), and an improved value proposition for primary care. Redesigning primary care through new models that utilize teams of primary care practitioners and high functioning registered nurses could change a dynamic that has plagued primary care for some time. Seeking solutions to underperforming primary care practices, unhappy providers, and less than ideal outcomes has resulted in a critical look at the way primary care has been designed and managed. Evidence of high performing practices reported in the literature shows promising outcomes that we need to act on; primary care needs a makeover!

This was the basic premise for a collaboration between the Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation and the American Academy of Nursing to plan for a Macy Foundation Conference on Primary Care and a reimagined role for registered nurses. The conference, held on June 15 to 18, 2016, resulted in the report: "Registered Nurses: Partners in Transforming Primary Care." The recommendations in the report focus on *preparing registered nurses for enhanced roles in primary care*. I am pleased to share those specific recommendations with you and urge you to read the full report. It details the literature and rich discussion among conference attendees that underlie these recommendations. The report also contains four commissioned papers on the future of primary care:

- "The Future of Primary Care: Enhancing the Registered Nurse Role" authored by Tom Bodenheimer;

- "Registered Nurses in Primary Care: Strategies That Support Practice at the Full Scope of the Registered Nurse Licensure" authored by Margaret Flinter, Mary Blankson, and Maryjoan Ladden;
- "Expanding the Role of Registered Nurses in Primary Care: A Business Case Analysis" authored by Jack Needleman; and
- "Preparing Nursing Students for Enhanced Roles in Primary Care: The Current State of Pre-licensure and RN-to-BSN Education" authored by Danuta Wojnar and Ellen-Marie Whelan.

The specific recommendations that the conferees agreed were urgently needed to move forward a transformation of primary care and the role of registered nurses are as follows ([Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation, 2016](#)):

1. "Leaders of nursing schools, primary care practices, and health systems should actively facilitate culture change that elevates primary care in RN education and practice."
2. "Primary care practices should redesign their care models to utilize the skills and expertise of RNs in meeting the healthcare needs of patients—and payers and regulators should facilitate this redesign."
3. "Nursing school leaders and faculty should elevate primary care content in the education of pre-licensure and RN-to-BSN nursing students."
4. "Leaders of primary care practices and health systems should facilitate lifelong education and professional development opportunities in primary care and support practicing RNs in pursuing careers in primary care."
5. "Academia and healthcare organizations should partner to support and prepare nursing faculty to educate pre-licensure and RN-to-BSN students in primary care knowledge, skills, and perspective."
6. "Leaders and faculty in nursing education and continuing education programs should include inter-professional education and teamwork in primary care nursing curricula."

A number of actionable items were included in the report that highlight the necessary changes to activate each of the six recommendations and place an emphasis in all sectors of health care on the value of primary care as a career choice. For example, it would be necessary for leaders in nursing schools and practices to advocate for and allocate resources to a new focus on primary care knowledge and skills and to promote academic–community partnerships to

elevate the visibility of primary care. It would also be necessary for payers to create alternate payment models that support the work of all team members in primary care including RNs. Primary care practices would need to evaluate the skill mix of team members and enhance or reconfigure roles to optimize the engagement of RNs in roles such as care management, care coordination, prevention and wellness, and support RNs leading primary care teams when appropriate. A number of barriers exist in state practice acts that are outdated and undermine enhanced roles for RNs in primary care; these need to be examined and eliminated. Pipeline programs are needed to create a diverse workforce of RNs to meet the needs of a more diverse population. The curriculum within schools of nursing will require an infusion of topics relevant for primary care practice with a particular focus on concepts such as population health, health equity, leadership, delivery models, and systems innovation. Academic and practice partnerships across primary care settings could enhance the development of new RN roles and co-create primary care transformation. Models that create a culture of respect and equal partnerships among RNs, physicians, nurse practitioners, and other team members could enable more autonomy in practice and a sharing of roles leading to better outcomes for patients and more satisfaction for clinicians.

These actions and many more are contained in the Macy Report, and it is the hope of the participants engaged in this work, the American Academy of Nursing, and the Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation that the movement so critically needed in transforming primary care will get underway.

REFERENCE

Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation. (2016). *Registered nurses: Partners in transforming primary care. Recommendations from the Macy Foundation Conference on preparing registered nurses for enhanced roles in primary care*. New York, NY: Author.

Author Description

Bobbie Berkowitz is the President of the American Academy of Nursing.

Bobbie Berkowitz, PhD, RN, NEA-BC, FAAN
Dean and Professor
Columbia University School of Nursing
New York, NY
Sr. Vice President
Columbia University Medical Center
New York, NY

Corresponding author: Bobbie Berkowitz
Columbia University School of Nursing
Columbia University Medical Center
630 West 168th St., MC6
New York, NY 10032.

E-mail address: bb2509@cumc.columbia.edu

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