Legislating Entry into Nursing Practice
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For decades, the education standard for entry into nursing practice has generated spirited debate from people inside and outside of the nursing profession. In 1923, the Goldmark Report suggested that the standard of education for nurses should be a bachelor’s degree (BSN). In 1965, the American Nurses Association (ANA) published the position paper on entry into professional nursing advocating that the baccalaureate degree be the entry level for registered nursing practice (Smith, 2009). The ANA recognized the educational gap between nursing and other health professions was growing and believed that a baccalaureate education was needed if nurses were to maintain equal status with other healthcare professionals. While the ANA is no longer leading the charge to promote the BSN as the minimum educational level for entry to practice, other influential groups and organizations have taken the lead to endorse advancing the baccalaureate degree as the entry level for professional nursing.

Four States’ Efforts 1965 to 2003
Soon after the ANA released the position paper in 1965, four states were chosen to begin work on implementation of BSN as entry level to practice – Oregon, Montana, Maine, and North Dakota. The Oregon Board of Nursing moved forward with recommendations to require a minimum of a BSN for Registered Nurses and a minimum of an Associate Degree to become Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs). The Community College Association lobbied to sponsor legislation to strip the Board of Nursing of the power to set educational standards for nursing and was successful in stopping the entry issue in Oregon.

In Montana, the Board of Nursing was working under the assumption that it had the power to regulate educational standards for nursing but opponents fought with legislation and the proposal was defeated as well. Maine was the only state that recognized the Board of Nursing did not have the authority to change educational requirements and brought their proposal to the state legislature. The state legislature adopted the proposal but strong oppositional groups worked to rescind the educational standards to have BSN as entry into professional nursing practice.

The North Dakota Board of Nursing was given the legislative authority in 1977 to set requirements for nursing education and was the only state able to fully implement changes to the educational requirement. From 1987 to 2003, North Dakota was the only state to require a bachelor’s degree for nursing licensure. This law was revoked in 2003 after the North Dakota Long Term Care Association and the North Dakota Hospital Association lobbied to rescind the educational requirements (Smith, 2009). Within 10 years after establishing BSN as a requirement for entry to practice, North Dakota successfully increased the percentage of nurses with higher degrees to 54%, despite the rural demographic population, which was perceived as a barrier to baccalaureate education (Nelson, 2002).

“BSN in 10” Legislative Bills
With the Institute of Medicine’s (IOM) Future of Nursing – Leading Change, Advancing Health report, there is new discussion regarding the entry to practice. Several states are now making legislative moves to establish the baccalaureate as the minimum entry level. New York, New Jersey, and Rhode Island have “BSN in 10” bills that would require new graduates of associate degree and diploma programs to obtain a BSN within 10 years of initial licensure. The states will provide a grandfather clause for nurses who are already licensed or enrolled in nursing school before the enactment of the bill (Nelson, 2002). Other states are considering similar proposals in the interest of ensuring a better educated workforce.
**Foreign Countries BSN Requirements**
Several countries have embraced the move to the baccalaureate level requirement for entry into nursing practice. The Canadian Nurses Association moved to adopt BSN as required for entry in 1982 and countries such as Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Korea, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, the Philippines, Portugal, Spain, and Sweden have moved to require baccalaureate as entry to practice (Zimmerman, et al, 2010).

**BSN Requirements at two Healthcare Organizations**
While not all states are looking into passing legislation requiring a baccalaureate degree in nursing for licensure, many healthcare organizations are considering educational progression standards to increase the number of BSN nurses. The Virginia Commonwealth University Health System requires enrollment in an accredited RN to BSN program within 24 months of hire and graduation within five years of hire (Zimmerman, et al, 2010). At Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital, the IOM recommendations were put into action and new educational criteria was established for all levels of nursing – with BSN as the entry-level requirement for nurses (Johnson, et al, 2012).

**Doctoral Requirements in other Healthcare Professions**
Many countries are responding to the increasing complexity of patient care and nursing needs and are requiring the baccalaureate degree as an entry requirement for nursing licensure, while other healthcare professions, such as physical therapy, occupational therapy, and pharmacy, are requiring master and doctoral degrees as their entry point. What will the message be for the future of nursing?

**References**


