Congressional Briefing Stresses Crucial Need for Highly Educated Nursing Workforce

BY PEGGY EASTMAN

WASHINGTON—As the population ages and health care delivery becomes ever more complex, the need for excellence in graduate nursing education will become more and more important. That was the conclusion of speakers at a Congressional briefing here on Capitol Hill. The briefing, called “Preparing the Nursing Workforce for a Changing Health System,” was sponsored by the Alliance for Health Reform with support from AARP and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

An issue brief prepared by the Alliance revealed that the demand for registered nurses is projected to grow modernized to train a greater percentage of nurses at the graduate level and provide the skills nurses need to evolve toward more team-based, data-driven, coordinated care; and
• Since nursing supply and demand vary by state and community, there may be shortages based on geography, and disparities may exist at the state level.

In October 2010, the Institute of Medicine issued a major report on the future of nursing (OT 10/25/2010 issue) recommending that:
1. Nurses should practice to the full extent of their education and training;
2. Nurses should achieve higher levels of education and training through an improved education system that promotes seamless academic progression;
3. Nurses should be full partners with physicians and other health care professionals, in redesigning U.S. health care; and
4. Effective workforce planning and policy making require better data collection and an improved information infrastructure.

The IOM report, “The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health,” stated: “In order to ensure that nurses are ready to assume leadership roles, nursing education programs need to embed leadership-related competencies throughout.”

Speaking at the briefing, Edward Salsberg, MPA, Director of Health Workforce Studies at George Washington University School of Nursing and Founding Director of the National Center for Health Workforce Analysis at the federal Health Resources and Services Administration, said: “We’re very concerned with the growing demand for health care services.” This increasing demand for services, he added, stems from a growing population, an aging population, and the success of medical advances that keep people alive longer.

“Given increasing roles and responsibilities, graduate nursing educating plays a critical role in preparing advanced practice RNs for the future health care system—are we educating them in the right way?”

Salsberg noted that the Affordable Care Act will bring major changes to health service delivery, and that advanced practice nurses are well suited for this change: The ACA will focus on care coordination and prevention, and encourage efficiency and value. Health care needs are concentrated especially among the elderly and chronically ill, with about 15 percent of the U.S. population using 75 percent of health services.

“I think advanced practice nurses can contribute a lot to this population... It’s so clear to me that if we use other health practitioners besides physicians as part of a team, we can do a better job of meeting the needs of the population,” he emphasized.

Deborah Trautman, PhD, RN, Chief Executive Officer of the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN), noted that for 50 years programs under Title VIII of the U.S. Public Health Service Act have supported the supply and distribution of nurses at all levels, and that these programs serve as the largest dedicated source of federal funding for nursing education, including advanced education, and workforce development. “That support needs to continue, and we can’t afford a step back,” she said. “Our vision for the future is a highly educated nursing workforce.”

Citing the factors mentioned by Salsberg—an aging population, an increasing number of patients with chronic disease, and the increasing complexity of the U.S. health delivery system—Trautman said, “Our work is not done. It’s imperative that we have the number of advanced practice nurses that we need.” According to AACN data, 11.8 percent of registered nurses in the U.S. are licensed advanced practice RNs.

Medicare Graduate Nurse Education Demonstration Project

Recognizing the need for highly trained graduate nurses, the ACA authorized a four-year, $200 million Medicare Graduate Nurse Education Demonstration Project under the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, said continued on page 2

Nursing programs turned away 78,089 qualified applicants in 2013 (the most recent year with full data) due to faculty shortages, lack of clinical training sites, and budget constraints.
The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), the nation’s largest payer for cancer care, last month announced its long-awaited Oncology Care Model (http://bit.ly/1CokFjH), and I will be investigating various aspects of that in future issues as well as in my Practice Matters OT blog (bit.ly/OT-LolaButcher).

In the meantime, shortly before the CMS announcement, the agency also provided news about how quickly it intends to move to value-based payment: By the end of 201, the plan is to have 50 percent of its payments to physicians and hospitals based on the quality and cost of care they provide.

I had the chance to speak with Lindsay Conway and Rob Lazerow from The Advisory Board Company to get their take on what this all means for oncologists. The Advisory Board Company is a research, consulting, and technology company that works with about 3,800 hospitals, health systems, employed medical groups, and independent physician practices.

Conway heads the company’s Oncology Roundtable, a membership program for cancer care administrators, most of whom work in hospital-based cancer programs. Lazerow leads the Health Care Advisory Board, working with senior health system executives and overseeing research about new payment models.

Listen to a podcast of the conversation on the iPad edition of this issue, and/or read the transcript at http://bit.ly/OT-ConwayLazerow.

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