OREGON NURSES ASSOCIATION
ACTION REPORT
National Nurse for Public Health Initiative

Submitted by: The ONA Cabinet on Health Policy

Recommended Action:

That ONA advocate for the continued role and increased visibility of public health nursing in health care reform proposals including supporting the provisions for the National Nurse for Public Health contained in The National Nurse Act of 2011.

Background:

At the state and national level, communities, providers and government agencies are developing plans for reforming the health care system. It is increasingly acknowledged that the health care system of the future will require that health care providers link together in communities to assure prevention and health promotion as a priority, achieve coordination of care and services delivered by multiple entities (e.g. schools, convenient care clinics, safety net clinics, etc.), reduce health disparities and connect individuals and families to care. The role of public health nursing is vital to creating community level systems, identifying public health concerns and achieving early intervention for identified needs.

Nurses, as both providers and consumers, know that the US healthcare system is consuming a growing percentage of our financial and human resources without yielding improved health status. Increasing epidemics of chronic preventable diseases, poor health literacy and continuing health disparities will be better addressed with a shift to focus on prevention in our communities. Eighteen other countries are more proactive than the US in reducing preventable deaths (Dunham, 2008) and the US ranks 30th among all industrialized countries in infant mortality (MacDorman & Mathews, 2009). Every year 1.3 trillion dollars is spent on managing the impact of the 7 most common chronic diseases, most of which are preventable (DeVol, 2007).

These figures speak volumes about our healthcare system, a system that is based on sick care not health care. A philosophical and cultural shift to focus on wellness at the national level that is reinforced by nurses in every community would go a long way in promoting health, reducing costs and saving lives.

Americans rank prevention as the number one healthcare reform priority and overwhelmingly support increasing funding for prevention programs to reduce disease and keep people healthy (TFAH & RWJF, 2009). Replication and expansion of evidence-based disease prevention programs could result in a cost savings of $16 billion annually within the next five years (TFAH, 2008).

Nurses play key roles in improving health literacy by supporting community linkages to enhance understanding, integrating cultural values, improving system knowledge, and advocating for underserved and high risk populations (Pawlak, 2005). Nurses are the largest segment of the healthcare workforce (ANSR, 2010), and deliver proven interventions and authoritative messages about health maintenance and disease prevention (RWJF, 2008), and are highly valued and trusted by the public (Gallup, 2010). Nursing’s unique contributions to improving the health of our nation will be highlighted and strengthened with prominent nursing leadership promoting evidence-based practices (RWJF, 2009).
The National Nurse Act of 2011 proposes that Congress designate the CNO of the US Public Health Service position as the National Nurse for Public Health to serve as a recognizable leader in health promotion and disease prevention, elevate nursing’s influence and prominence, better utilize the expertise of nurses, and serve a vital function in our current climate of healthcare reform (Mills & Schneider, 2009). The National Nurse for Public Health would assume the current duties of the CNO and would provide guidance and leadership and conduct media campaigns and make personal appearances for activities to promote public health. This would include encouraging nurses and other health professionals to be volunteers and to develop projects that educate the public on and engage the public in prevention practices to achieve better health and encourage individuals to enter the nursing profession.

Implementation:

The Oregon Nurses Association will:

1. Advocate for the inclusion of public health nursing in Oregon health care transformation proposals and through ANA at the national level.
2. Endorse the changes in role and title of the Chief Nursing Officer of the US Public Health Service contained in the National Nurse Act of 2011.
4. Send a copy of this resolution to the President and CEO of the American Nurses Association and members of the Oregon Congressional Delegation, and any others deemed appropriate by the ONA Board of Directors.

Financial Impact:

No additional fiscal impact is anticipated.

References:


