

# Nursing shortages and continuing education



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Nursing Shortages and Continuing Education The debate continues over the reason for the shortage of nurses, especially at the bachelor's degree level, and what can be done to attract more associate degree nurses (ADN /RN) to continue their education into the baccalaureate degree (BSN) level. Although a shortage of all nurses across the spectrum is concerning, it is most acutely felt at the baccalaureate level where only 30 percent of the nursing workforce holds a BSN degree (source).

Doctor Janine Spencer, author of " Increasing RN-BSN Enrollments: Facilitating Articulation Through Curriculum Reform," originally published in The Journal of Continuing Education in Nursing, makes a case for curriculum reform at the RN to BSN level. This paper will briefly summarize that article. The complex issues facing the medical profession today doubles with the extreme shortage of nurses, indicates a more intensive demand of higher education in the nursing profession. The benefits of baccalaureate training are significant in comparison to the training of an associate's degree nurse.

The baccalaureate trained nurse exhibits a broader knowledge in all aspects of the healthcare environment and has a more solid foundation of critical thinking and problem solving. Additionally, the baccalaureate program promotes leadership skills which are vital for establishing a positive work environment especially with today's almost crippling shortage of a highly-effective nursing workforce. However, the associate degree training is not without its many benefits, which includes opening the door quickly to entry-level nurses.

Beginning nurses are able to enter the field with a basic knowledge of technical skills with little time constraint and at minimal expense. With only 16 to 20 percent of all RN's returning to continue their education into the BSN program (source), the question must be raised as to the obstacles these nurses face which prevent them from doing so. The issue of access was ruled out when a 2003 article by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing reported that 628 Baccalaureate schools of nursing across the United States offered RN to BSN programs.

Another issue which was looked at was the articulation agreement process which helps to define the overall standards of the RN to BSN program, thereby alleviating confusion and focusing on the final goal consistency. Progress is ongoing in trying to provide a solution. A look at the current trends in RN to BSN curriculum was done in California at 13 public universities. Five major categories of course content were determined and studied for evaluation. The core courses in all 13 were regarded as appropriate for the curriculum.

Six of the 13 offered bridge courses and were determined to be sound practice as they helped the student transition into the program. Pre-licensure courses were considered questionable due to the concern raised of recurrence of material in the ADN program. The innovative courses and practices were found to vary widely across all program environments. Surprisingly, only two of the programs practiced service learning which involves the students in community service outreach programs. Recognizing the differences in how the BSN program is approached, one can see the need for more consistency in the academic environment.

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Some ways to attract the returning RN may include: looking at the career objectives of each individual student, keeping time constraints to a minimum, design classes and assignments to encourage more critical thinking skills, using case studies in order to provoke more enthusiasm for problem solving, using individualized programs to help a student develop his or her own career goals, or collaborating with community healthcare agencies so the students can connect with a mentoring facility. Finally, constant assessment of the program and its effectiveness will make the program more successful.