

**Brief overview
comparing associate
and baccalaureate
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This paper explores the major differences between associate and baccalaureate prepared nurses. Although associate and baccalaureate prepared nurses both sit for the same national exam after program graduation, they are still different in many ways. Baccalaureate prepared nurses must encompass all the same schooling as the associate prepared nurse, but must additionally take on courses to prepare them to meet the demands of today's nursing. Baccalaureate prepared nurses also are more beneficial to their patients and workplaces by providing patients with safer care, and also with the ability to advance their career quicker than the associate prepared nurse. These nurses differ from ADN prepared nurses because they possess greater knowledge regarding health promotion, disease prevention, and reduction of risk. Knowledge in leadership and management, community nursing, and overall wellness also make the ADN nurse and BSN nurse dissimilar. Both educated nurses' work to achieve the best possible level of wellness for their patients.

Keywords: Associate prepared nurse(s), baccalaureate prepared nurse(s)

A Brief Overview Comparing Associate and Baccalaureate Prepared Nurses

The first baccalaureate nursing programs were established in the US in the early 1900's, but the need for nurses didn't start until the 1960's. The associate degree level of nursing was developed out of a need to produce nurses in response to a shortage during and following World War II. Although the associate degree programs alleviated the shortage back then, it was never meant to replace the professional level of nursing education. Recently, associate degree programs have become more popular because of the

inexpensive cost and the amount of time it takes to obtain a degree.

Researchers have shown that although there are many similarities, the benefit of an associate prepared (ADN) nurse to pursue a baccalaureate (BSN) degree is much greater than it is to just stop at the ADN level. This paper evaluates the difference between ADN prepared nurses and BSN prepared nurses that include the education one must obtain, the level of competencies and care for the patient, and the opportunity for career advancement.

Although education between both degree programs are similar, the baccalaureate nursing programs offer the nurse greater knowledge. Baccalaureate nursing programs contain all of the courses taught in associate degree programs, but then also incorporate more science courses, nursing theory and research, community health, and leadership and management. The extra course work is meant to enhance the nurses' professional development and prepare the nurse for a broader scope of practice. The additional knowledge also provides the nurse with a better understanding of any issues that may affect the patients and influence the delivery of care. Baccalaureate graduates also are taught to have more analytical and creative capacities and can eventually demonstrate stronger nursing skills in all areas. What's more, with a baccalaureate degree, nurses that wish to further their education or strive for a higher position like a nurse practitioner, certified registered nurse anesthetist, or even a nurse educator, can do so. An associate's prepared nurse cannot.

In addition to the supplementary education that BSN nurses obtain, BSN

nurses are known to offer a more individualized quality of care to their
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patients than the ADN nurse. Baccalaureate nurses demonstrate this by providing patient care that centers on uniquely identifying, respecting, and addressing patient issues, values, and needs. Various studies have also found that BSN nurses have a stronger communication system and use more problem solving skills (Johnson, 1988). They also have a higher proficiency in their ability to make nursing diagnoses and evaluate nursing interventions (Giger & Davidhizar, 1990). Baccalaureate prepared nurses are prepared to adapt to situations more accurately than an associates prepared nurse. They are shown how to apply more specific care to their patients to prevent disease and achieve optimum levels of wellness. A study conducted by the California Institute for Nursing & Health Care in 2008 found that higher prevalence of baccalaureate and masters-prepared RNs at the bedside positively impact patient outcomes. The director stated, " there is a growing body of evidence that shows that BSN graduates bring unique skills to their work as nursing clinicians and play an important role in the delivery of safe patient care." The link between higher levels of nursing education and better patient outcomes clearly shows positive impacts for not only the patients, but also to the nurses.

The additional knowledge that a BSN prepared nurse gains from the courses in management and leadership allows for these nurses to partake in career advancement. This does not mean that an associate prepared nurse cannot ever obtain these higher positions, but that it will take longer. For example, if I, an associate prepared staff nurse, and a bachelor prepared nurse were both to apply for a position as a charge nurse, the bachelor prepared nurse will more likely be given the position because the BSN prepared nurse is

more educated in leadership and management. The career ladder is much steeper for the ADN nurse. In many studies conducted, many chief nurse officers in university hospitals also express their preference to hire BSN nurses based on their education. In a 2001 survey published in the *Journal of Nursing Administration*, 72% of these directors identified dissimilarities in practice between nurses, stating, “ BSN nurses are prized for their skills in critical thinking, leadership, case management, and health promotion, and for their ability to practice across a variety of inpatient and outpatient settings.” Thus, offering the BSN nurse greater opportunities for career advancement in whatever setting they choose.

The differences mentioned in this paper are just a few out of many differences between ADN prepared nurses and BSN prepared nurses. These differences include, but are not limited to education, the level of competencies and care for the patient, and the opportunity for career advancement. What is most important is for our society to recognize that as nurses expand their role and progress further into providing more unique care, the need for BSN prepared nurses will become more vital to facilitate to today's new world of medicine and technology.