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The Prospective Role of the National Nurse

What is a National Nurse? You are listening to ReachMD, the Channel for Medical Professionals. Welcome to Focus On the Future Medicine. I am Susan Dolan, your host, and with me is Teri Mills, Registered Nurse and President of the National Nursing Network Organization and Alisa Schneider, Registered Nurse and Secretary of the National Nursing Network Organization.

SUSAN DOLAN:

Teri and Alisa, welcome to Focus on Future Medicine.

ALISA SCHNEIDER:

Thank you Susan. Its a pleasure to be on.

TERI MILLS:

Susan, we really appreciate having the opportunity. Thank you so much.

SUSAN DOLAN:

Alisa let us start with you. What would the goals of a national nurse be?

ALISA SCHNEIDER:

Well, Susan, we are recommending that the chief nurse officer of the US Public Health Service be elevated to the Office of the National Nurse and that would require that position becoming full time and would require an increasing rank and salary. Now the aspect of the national nurse is intended to establish symbolic national leadership to promote a cultural shift to prevention in the US Healthcare System. We intend for the national nurse to raise this ability, enhance the prestige, and support recruitments in nursing, especially within public health nursing, the commission core of the US Public Health Service, and other healthcare professions. We also need a national nurse to accurately portray nursing to the public and enhance public understanding of the critical role nurses play in society and in healthcare. We are nearly 3 million strong and I think many people don't truly understand what nurses do. The national nurse would complement the Surgeon General in improving health literacy and decreasing health disparities, and endorsing and supporting involvement in Medical Reserve Core to improve health of communities and safety in our communities.

SUSAN DOLAN:

Would the Chief Nurse Officer position still exist if a National Nurse position is created?

ALISA SCHNEIDER:

The Chief Nurse Officer position would be re-titled to the National Nurse, it would not be a new position, but a modernization of an existing position to focus on wellness and health promotion.

SUSAN DOLAN:

How would the National Nurse position compared to the Surgeon General?

ALISA SCHNEIDER:

Well, the Chief Nurse Officer works with the Surgeon General currently and this complementary role would be continued and enhanced. We give kind of a simplified explanation of how this would work. The CDC generates research and information about the health and

disease conditions in our country, the Surgeon General's office synthesizes and priorities this research, and what we are missing in the system are the messengers of the information to promote wellness and prevent illness. We are recommending that the Office of the National Nurse be that messenger system.

SUSAN DOLAN:

Describe how nurses from across the country would be involved?

ALISA SCHNEIDER:

Nurses from across the country would be encouraged to participate in their local communities through existing systems such as the Medical Reserve Core, the Parish Nurse Organizations, the American Red Cross, and those systems already in place and working to promote the public's wellness. This Office of the National Nurse would serve to encourage and supplement these volunteer organizations. Nurses would come from their community and serve their community members, so there have been questions about how would ethnic and minority communities be served and they would be served by the very nurses that currently work in those communities that know the needs of those specific community members.

SUSAN DOLAN:

What potential does the National Nurse position have for reducing health disparity?

ALISA SCHNEIDER:

Well, Susan, first we need to expand and replicate programs that have proven to be successful in underserved areas of our country. The National Nurse would still assume the role of chief of US Public Health Service Commission Core Nurses. Commission Core currently has approximately 6000 members of which only 1360 are nurses. We need to see the cap on the nursing core be raised so that that core can be strengthened. These are the nurses who provide care in areas typically facing health disparity.

SUSAN DOLAN:

Would nursing students and retirees have an opportunity to participate?

ALISA SCHNEIDER:

These are some of our most valuable and available volunteer sources and we have spend a lot of time educating students across the country about how to become involved with this initiative and how to be politically active, how to use their voice, and how to educate the public on staying well and reducing illness. So our students are our next generation of leaders and we think that they are ready and are going to take this initiative forward into their practice and we know that we have large numbers of nurses retiring, there are various regions and a lot of organizations working on the workplace issues that are causing nurses to retire, but they are our experienced resource and we need to keep them involved in their communities and involved in healthcare. So, these are the nurses that were asking to become more involved with the Medical Reserve Corps and other agencies within their communities.

SUSAN DOLAN:

Will a National Nurse help address the nursing shortage?

ALISA SCHNEIDER:

Well we know that the nursing shortage is actually looking worse than we anticipated. The American Association of Colleges of Nursing reports that were going to have about a 500,000 nurse shortage by 2025 and that is going to require us to expand beyond our current enrollment in nursing school. What we see the Office of the National Nurse doing is encouraging people to look at nursing as a respectable viable carrier for them to pursue. We need young people to look to nursing as their future.

If you are just joining us you are listening to Focus on Future Medicine on ReachMD, the Channel for Medical Professionals. I am Susan Dolan, your host and with me are Registered Nurses, Teri Mills and Alisa Schneider with the National Nursing Network Organization discussing the National Nurse.

SUSAN DOLAN:

Teri, describe the prevention programs the National Nurse would champion.

TERI MILLS:

Well, first of all, there is increasing physical activity, of course having better nutrition and smoking cessation, but the National Nurse would advocate per nurses and those in other healthcare disciplines to be engaged in successful community based program to

accomplish both goals. The main thing for you listeners to know is that public health is local and every state and community is different and have their set of health related issues, so once the need has been identified then the national nurse would serve to really recruit nurses and other serving in the Medical Reserve Corp in their own community to assist in delivering the appropriate messages or programs of prevention.

SUSAN DOLAN:

Give us some success stories of community-based programs that have done very well?

TERI MILLS:

First of all, we have really been trying to test this idea where we teach, which is Portland Community College and we are participating in our second healthy living fair. This is going to be a Love Your Heart Day for cardiovascular week and we are having our nursing students team up with the Medical Reserve Corp and the hospital where they are presently having clinical and delivering a healthy living program. Another program of success has been our Diabetes Expo, which has just grown by leaps and bounce and again by having students' team with retirees and other workers this has really helped to provide some data for successful programs.

SUSAN DOLAN:

Alisa?

ALISA SCHNEIDER:

And Susan I want to also comment that we need to have an increase in enrollment of nursing students. Unfortunately, what happens is the more students we put out there, the fewer clinical sites we end up with. We are losing public health clinical sites, that means the site where a student would go and learn hands-on practice in that area of nursing. The student who gets involved with Medical Reserve Corps, the Parish Nurses or the local community agencies actually gets exposure to these public health clinical type sites, and so this is an expansion of their access to public health sites and we think that's really valuable for addressing the nursing shortage issue.

SUSAN DOLAN:

Tell us more about the Medical Reserve Corps for nursing.

TERI MILLS:

The Medical Reserve Corps was established and funded after 9/11 for emergency preparedness and it is a multidisciplinary corps, so anybody with a medical background or even if you don't has opportunity to volunteer. The corps also has taken on the added responsibility of health promotion and prevention and presently about 48,000 nurses have signed up to volunteer, but that's just a mere 2% of the nursing work for, so you can see that many more are needed, and of course because of their high level of education and expertise they really have been able to deliver a lot of health promotion and prevention programs that have been successful in their own communities.

SUSAN DOLAN:

How can listeners support the National Nurse initiative?

TERI MILLS:

Well, we have tried to make this as easy as possible at our website, www.nationalnurse.org. We have links for ways to help that include links so that listeners could find out who their members of congress are, we have sample letters. We would also like to urge your listeners to contact organizations that they belong to because it's the members that really should be advancing the organization's agenda. It should come from the grass roots and that root of the organization; the member is not from a top to bottom leadership style. We do have sample letters that they could send on to their organizations and then finally we just urge them to write their own members of congress and encourage them to support legislation to create the Office of the National Nurse.

SUSAN DOLAN:

Does the National Nursing Network Organization have members?

TERI MILLS:

Well, we have several thousands who signed out for our news letter and we have a board, an official board of directors and then we have like a liaison group of supporters from around the country who have just given us endless time, energy, they have written articles for it, they provided graphics for our logos, we do have merchandise for sale on a website and a few supporters actually designed all of those

pieces and merchandise. So we have quite a group of gross root nurses who are very excited as well as interested members of the public who have been very supportive of us.

SUSAN DOLAN:

What legislative successes have you had so far?

TERI MILLS:

Well, of course, the bill that was introduced by congress from the lowest counts in the 109th congress to create the Office of a National Nurse that amass 42 cosponsors before the end of the session and that was one of our biggest successes, it did honor by participant supports that was very exciting. The other big legislative success stories that we have had so far is that members of our organization supporter have actually gone to their own state legislative body to their own state legislators and asked them to introduce resolutions urging congress to enact an Office of a National Nurse and 3 states have now voted on such resolutions and they passed unanimously those were New York, Massachusetts, and Vermont, and we know that several other states are now considering similar resolutions in 2009, and of course we were looking for reintroduction of revised language to elevate the Chief Nurse Officer position to full-time status and officially designate this position to be the National Nurse in the 1011th congress.

SUSAN DOLAN:

What's your take-home message?

TERI MILLS:

Prevention must be priorities of the nation, and if ever we had an opportunity to reform healthcare it really is now with this new administration and new congress, and nurses are very capable of making a significant difference to make this happen. Our country really needs to focus on prevention both in policy and in practice, and a National Nurse would promote a philosophical and cultural shift to make this happen.

Thanks to Teri Mills, President of the National Nursing Network Organization and Alisa Schneider, Secretary of the National Nursing Network Organization for joining us to discuss the national nurse. I am Susan Dolan and you have been listening to Focus on Future Medicine on ReachMD, the Channel for Medical Professionals.

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