



EDITORIAL

The Advanced Practice Nurse: A Path Forward to Achieve Universal Health Coverage

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Advanced Practice Nurses (APNs) are an essential workforce positioned to achieve the goals of Universal Health Coverage (UNC). Increasing advanced practice nursing capacity needs to be prioritized globally.

An expanded scope of nursing practice is emerging globally, in response to the need for increased human resources for health systems in support of the unanimous United Nations resolution to move forward with Universal Health Coverage (UNC). UNC is a global initiative with the goal that all individuals will have access to quality health care services free of the financial burden. More specifically, UNC includes access to essential services of “comprehensive primary health-care services, with extensive geographical coverage, including in remote and rural areas, and with a special emphasis on access to populations most in need, and has an adequate skilled, well-trained and motivated workforce” (Universal Health Coverage Coalition. United Nations Resolution on Global Health and Foreign Policy, 2012). This edict, in combination with increasing complexity of health needs, the aging of the population, limited resources, healthcare workforce shortages and gaps in educational preparation to meet the demand, poses a persistent challenge to achieve UNC. Advanced practice nurses are poised to be a critical workforce in the achievement of Universal Health Care.

Moving towards UNC calls for regions to re-envision and strengthen their health care systems, build health professional capacity in UHC’s essential services, enrich and maximize the scope of practice and establish new

models of care. The United Nations Resolution calls for a “resilient health system that provides comprehensive primary health care.” This demands a well-educated, motivated and empowered workforce committed to improving population health outcomes, reaching the underserved in remote and rural communities, and providing access to the most vulnerable populations (Universal Health Coverage Coalition. United Nations Resolution on Global Health and Foreign Policy, 2012). I posit that these are basic tenets of nursing and are built into the fabric of the nursing profession. The foundation of nursing includes the principles of holistic health, the health and illness continuum across the lifespan, patient and family-centered care, and the provision of services where is most needed in the community and home. These principles are basic to UNC. The APN is the natural development and builds upon these principles with knowledge and skills in primary care, epidemiology, clinical decision-making, and translation of evidence into practice. Advanced practice nursing expands and transforms the scope of nursing with laser focus on the principles of UNC.

Such strategy requires that traditional, preconceived notions of nursing be updated with an unfettered openness to maximize the scope of nursing practice with the capacity to deliver patient-centered primary health care. To accomplish this, there is a required mandate to formally educate a generation of global health professionals committed to and prepared for UNC—the APN. The APN competencies, advanced skillset and

knowledge base are perfectly aligned with the goals of UNC: APNs represent the professionals who can fill the gap in capacity and have the potential to advance the goals of UNC. This is a clarion call to expand nursing education to meet this challenge, create robust and accessible graduate programs to prepare APNs.

Achieving UNC requires an expanding workforce capacity and starts with an adequate education. A critical directive towards UNC is the establishment of graduate degrees in nursing for APNs that broadens, deepens and augments the knowledge and skill of professional nurses to assume a leadership role and provide primary health care services, focused on the populations most in need, a precept of UNC. Graduate degree APN programs need not wait until the role is enshrined. This education should be offered to the pioneer nurses who are in the community who are already contributing to aspects of these essential

services and provide these pioneers with a progressive and purposeful education and the tools to overcome the barriers and successfully progress the region toward UNC. By advancing the education of nurses who desire more accountability and autonomy, the emerging workforce of APNs, tailored to meet the goals of UNC, will advance the systems of care with the patient and family at the center of the care. Formal graduate APN education provides the underpinning for the advanced level of clinical care, augments knowledge and skills for complex care needs of diverse populations, hones evidence-based clinical decision-making with a heightened commitment to health equity. Building the APN workforce on the shoulders of practicing nurses, in a relatively short period of time, will realize the vision of UNC. The advanced practice nurse is the path forward to achieve Universal Health Coverage.

REFERENCES

Universal Health Coverage Coalition. United Nations Resolution on Global Health and Foreign Policy. 12 December 2012. [Internet]. [Accessed 30 November 2024] retrieved from: <http://healthforall.org/un-resolution>