

## **Re-envisioning Advanced Practice: The 10-Year March Toward the DNP**

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In October 2004, the members of the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) voted to endorse a position statement in support of the Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) degree as the appropriate level of education for clinicians working at the highest level of nursing practice (AACN, 2004). This monumental decision ignited a groundswell of activity that forever changed how future advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs) and other nurse leaders are prepared to provide primary, preventative, and specialty care across patient populations, including to current service members, retired veterans, and their families.

Since this historic vote, most academic institutions offering advanced practice programs have already made the transition to the DNP or are in the process of doing so. To facilitate a change of this magnitude, AACN issued the *Essentials of Doctoral Education for Advanced Nursing Practice* in 2006 to clearly articulate the expectations for the design and implementation of high quality DNP programs. These guidelines were subsequently endorsed by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE) as a required set of standards to achieve accreditation for the DNP program. Additionally, a separate AACN task force developed an online tool kit for educators seeking to implement the DNP, which continues to serve as an important resource for use by those academic programs currently making the transition.

The evolution of the DNP has been shaped by the discipline's collective desire to move in this direction. Multiple organizations representing advanced practice nurses have endorsed the DNP and established frameworks for the education of nurse practitioners, nurse anesthetists, clinical nurse specialists, and others for this level of education. Additionally, the American Association of Nurse Anesthetists has endorsed the expectation that by 2015, no new master's level nurse anesthetist programs will be accredited and that all students interested in serving in this role must be educated in DNP programs by 2022.

With 217 DNP programs now enrolling students nationwide, more than 73% of nursing schools with master's level APRN programs have either begun developing a DNP or have made the move to the practice doctorate. Though the complete transition to the DNP for all nursing programs is not likely to occur by the original target date of 2015, the evidence is strong that momentum for change is still building given the widespread acceptance of the DNP among students, employers, and educators.

AACN will continue to support schools in their critical work to launch DNP programs and develop advanced nursing specialists with the skills needed to provide high quality, effective, and safe patient care. As we look to the future, adapting to new practice models and transforming healthcare delivery will require expert clinicians able to design, evaluate, and continuously improve the context in which care is delivered. DNP graduates are uniquely prepared to meet this challenge and to lead innovation in every setting in which they practice.

## REFERENCES

American Association of Colleges of Nursing. (2004). Position Statement on the Practice Doctorate in Nursing. Author: Washington, DC.

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