EDITORIAL

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Editor

Politics, Religion, and Nursing Education

Conventional wisdom tells us that two subjects should be avoided lest you risk causing a big stir—politics and religion. I have learned over the years that one other topic is sure to inflame the passions of nurses. That topic is, of course, educational requirements for entry into practice. Every few months, from one quarter or another, comes an editorial or opinion piece arguing that a baccalaureate education should be the minimum standard. This invariably leads to an immediate and strong response from graduates of associate degree nursing programs, angrily proclaiming that they are at least equal to and occasionally better than BSN-educated nurses and that nurses should not be attacking other nurses.

A recently published research report has stirred the pot yet again. Aiken, Clarke, Cheung, Sloane, and Silber (2003) found that after adjusting for a wide range of variables, hospitals with high proportions of nurses educated at the baccalaureate level or higher had lower surgical mortality and failure-to-rescue rates. Predictably, the American Association of Community Colleges (2003) called the study adequate, inaccurate, and methodologically flawed. Its response, distributed as a press release, took the study very personally, as is usually the case. The release accused study authors of maligning associate degree nurses, stated that the qualifications of the surgeons and the nurses is the most important factor, and argued that nursing care cannot be measured in the aggregate. This “stop picking on us” response is flawed, shows little understanding of research methodology, and does not advance the discussion.

Let me begin by saying that I hold all RNs in high regard. Nursing education is a tough career choice, worthy of the hard work of a collegiate program, and a profession important enough to hold its own as an esteemed job choice. If we set the bar high, we will appeal to those who are willing to do what it takes to achieve the goal. It takes at least four years of preparation, usually with an additional year of internship, to become a teacher.

While the baccalaureate education is important, it is not the only important factor in a patient's recovery. The qualifications of the nurses and the surgical patient mortality. JAMA, 290, 1617–1623.

References


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