QSEN Transforming Education

WITH THE 2003 Institute of Medicine (IOM) Report, Health Professions Education: A Bridge to Quality, educators were challenged to alter the process of professional development so that health professionals, including nurses, would graduate understanding and accepting that their jobs consisted of both caring for individual patients and continuously improving the quality, safety, and reliability of the health care systems within which they worked. In 2005, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) began a phenomenal effort to address the need for change within nursing education. The earliest phases of this RWJF initiative, titled Quality and Safety Education for Nurses (QSEN), were led by Drs. Linda Cronenwett and Gwen Sherwood, 10 nursing education leaders with expertise in quality and safety competencies and the pedagogies used in nursing education, and an advisory board of nursing and physician leaders representing clinical practice and the professional regulatory domains of accreditation, licensure, and certification.

Over a period of 8 years, QSEN evolved from a focus on preparing prelicensure nurses for basic practice to its latest phase focused on assuring that graduate level nursing programs also include extensive content and experiences focused on meeting the IOM mandates. Quality and safety competencies were defined, and the knowledge, skills, and attitudes for new generations of nursing professionals were articulated for both prelicensure and graduate nursing programs. Fifteen pilot schools of nursing joined the core QSEN team to experiment with strategies for developing quality and safety competencies in prelicensure programs. A robust Web site (www.qsen.org) became a highly used repository of teaching tools, simulation exercises, video resources, publications, annotated references, and faculty self-development modules for faculties worldwide.

As work commenced through the early phases of QSEN, there was clear evidence that a fundamentally critical element of transforming the curriculum for both prelicensure and advanced practice nursing education was the need for developing the capacity of faculty to envision and lead the curricular changes that were necessary to develop quality and safety competencies with students. Classroom instructors, simulation laboratory teachers, and clinical preceptor faculties all needed development in their domains. Thus, RWJF extended their support for QSEN by funding two separate grants in support of faculty development. A team of QSEN faculty partnered with the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) to develop and implement regional faculty development conferences. The phase focused on faculty development for prelicensure program faculty is completed (including 1,213 faculty from 594 entry level nursing programs, representing all levels of entry level education, in 49 states), while current AACN work continues on faculty development for graduate level nursing educators.

 Concurrently, Drs. Cronenwett and Sherwood at UNC-Chapel Hill, Pam Ironside at Indiana University and Shirley Moore at Case Western Reserve University were funded to support additional forms of faculty development. QSEN pilot school leaders and other experts joined Pam Ironside in developing learning modules for faculty that are available on the QSEN Web site so that a faculty member could develop competence in quality and safety education on their own, using ideas and guidance from national experts. Shirley Moore partnered with the Veterans Administration Quality Scholars (VAQS) program to expand what had been a purely physician development program into an interprofessional model. For each of the last 3 years, two nursing pre- or postdoctoral students have been admitted to the VAQS program from each of six sites, receiving intensive development with respect to quality improvement and safety sciences. Drs. Cronenwett and Sherwood led the development and implementation of three QSEN National Forums, through which innovators in the field of quality and safety education could come together and learn with and from each other about early experiments with curricular transformation and teaching strategies. Over 1,100 attendees at the first three forums stimulated and shared papers and posters with each other, with textbook educators, with staff development leaders from practice settings, and with the world through the Web site. Finally, faculty development was addressed by working with textbook editors and publishers, both to produce a textbook for faculty and graduate students (Sherwood, G. & Barnsteiner, J. (Eds.), 2012). Quality and safety in nursing: A competency approach to improving outcomes. Wiley-Blackwell.] and to add chapters or inserts into dozens of the next editions of major nursing textbooks.

As the faculty development work progressed, AACN was approached by the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation (GBMF) and asked to develop an intense
faculty development program for prelicensure faculty in the San Francisco Bay Area served by GBMF. This additional support allowed further testing and "deep dive" evaluation work on quality and safety education in partnership with the practice community. Concurrently, the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) developed a model “transition to practice” program for new nurses that included requirements for continuing development in the QSEN/IOM competencies. As a result of these initiatives, the pilot school partnerships with practice, and QSEN National Forum attendance by numerous staff development and clinical leaders, we are beginning to see adoption of QSEN competencies and KSAs (knowledge, skills, and abilities) into the job descriptions and performance appraisals of nurses in practice. Many “second generation” issues involving quality and safety in practice and interprofessional spheres were addressed in the September/October 2012 issue of Nursing Clinics of North America.

Leadership from RWJF leaders Sue Hassmiller, Rosemary Gibson, and MaryJoan Ladden, the entire QSEN faculty, the pilot schools, and the professional organizations who were funded (e.g., AACN) or otherwise supported this work (e.g., NLN, NONPF, NCSBN, and the multiple nursing organizations who participated on the Advisory Committee or in the development of goals and KSAs for graduation education) led to the transformative efforts that were harnessed to effect change in nursing professional development. The articles presented in this issue of the Journal of Professional Nursing (JPN) are a testament to the innovations that have emerged from calls to address the challenges raised in that first IOM report—To Err is Human and in the report Health Professions Education: A Bridge to Quality. AACN has been an enthusiastic partner in each phase of QSEN work and is pleased to present this issue of JPN as evidence of the transformative changes that have evolved.

AACN’s commitment to this work will not end with the completion of funding for these efforts but instead will continue as a professional mandate to assure that the best care is delivered to those for whom we care. Likewise, although RWJF funding has ended, Mary Dolansky et al. at Case Western Reserve University have accepted the transfer of leadership from Dr. Cronenwett et al. and have launched a new QSEN Institute, which will continue to support the QSEN Web site and QSEN National Forums (upcoming in Atlanta, GA, on May 30–31, 2013), while extending the work into interprofessional and practice domains. Collectively, we applaud the authors of the articles in this issue and look forward to the time when all new health professionals are well prepared for continuously improving the safety and quality of the health care systems within which they work.

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