



Protect Patient Safety & Access: Address the Workforce Shortage

Background

Washington is facing nursing workforce shortage. In 2022, the Washington State Legislature funded an additional 220 nurse education slots beginning in fiscal year 2023, but we cannot graduate more nurses until the following issues are addressed:

Clinical placement availability:

Clinical experience is a core component of nursing education and there are a minimum number of hours that nursing students must fulfill based on degree type. Nursing students obtain clinical experience through clinical placements, which can take place at a variety of health care settings like hospitals, outpatient facilities and long-term care facilities. Clinical placement availability, however, has not kept pace with the increase of nursing students. This has been attributed to lack of communication between nursing programs and health care settings that offer clinical placement opportunities, clinical placement coordination and a shortage of nurse preceptors.

Nurse preceptor shortage:

Nurse preceptors supervise nursing students during their clinical placement. Preceptors are nurses who work at the health care setting and provide students the opportunity to learn in real world environments. Precepting is voluntary and some preceptors may receive a nominal hourly wage increase for their time. Clinical placement availability is dependent on nurse preceptors but there is currently a preceptor shortage. This has been attributed to not enough available nursing staff, and nursing staff burnout.

Clinical placement hours:

The Nursing Care Quality Assurance Commission (NCAQC) requires nursing programs to set a minimum number of hours that nursing students must fulfill based on degree type. Establishing a minimum sets a standard but also allows nursing programs to far exceed the number of hours required. This means a student's requirement at one nursing program could amount to two or more students' requirements at another nursing program. Given the shortage of clinical placement availability, this results in unequal access and longer completion timeframes for some students.

WSHA Position

Clinical Placement Availability: Budget Proviso

WSHA supports improving direct communication between nursing education programs and health care facilities to better understand when and where, the type, and the number of clinical placements that are needed. This can be done through a budget proviso, granting funding through the already established central nursing resource center. The resource center will be responsible for gathering data, convening nurse education programs and health care facilities, and facilitating communication between them to help address barriers, understand needs, and increase clinical placement availability.

Nurse Preceptor Shortage: Budget Proviso

In 2022, the Washington State Legislature created a nurse preceptorship grant program of \$6 million, split between fiscal years 2022 and 2023, to the NCAQC for student nurse preceptorship. The program provides funding to eligible advanced registered nurse practitioners, registered nurses, and licensed practical nurses who are willing to supervise nursing students in health care settings. WSHA strongly supports making the grant program permanent to incentivize

nurses and help increase the number of clinical placement opportunities for nursing students.

Clinical Placement Hours: Policy

WSHA supports standardizing clinical hours requirements across schools for licensed practical nurse and registered nurse education programs to help ensure students have equal access to placement opportunities.

Nursing vacancies will only increase if long-term and permanent investments for the development of a sustainable health care workforce is not prioritized. Nurse education and clinical placements are essential for teaching the next generation of nurses and attracting more students to the state. Monetary investments by the legislature were a necessary step in the right direction, but more must be done.

Key Messages

- The [Nurse Preceptorship grant program](#) should be a continuous program rather than a one-time grant to utilize resources more effectively, and help alleviate the nurse preceptor and clinical placement shortages.
- To address the clinical placement shortage, funding should be provided to help improve communication between nurse education programs and health care facilities. This will help address barriers, identify needs and increase clinical placement availability.
- To ensure students have equal access to placement opportunities, clinical hours requirements should be standardized across schools for licensed practical nurse and registered nurse education programs.

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