Creating the Future of Nursing and Health Care in North Carolina

As the largest segment of the health care workforce, nurses have a vital role to play in transforming our health care system in order to provide quality care that is patient centered, accessible, evidence-based, sustainable, and that leads to improved health outcomes. Over the past two years, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) partnered with the Institute of Medicine (IOM) to assess and develop an action-oriented and evidence-based blueprint for the future of nursing and its role in advancing health care in this country. As with all IOM studies, the best evidence is evaluated by a committee of acknowledged experts in the field and recommendations are formulated to guide policy and future research. This RWJF Initiative on the Future of Nursing at the IOM was led by Dr. Donna Shalala, the former Secretary of Health and Human Services, and tapped the expertise of professionals across several disciplines. Their report, The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health, calls on all health professionals and health care decision makers to work with nurses to make the changes needed for a more accessible, cost-effective and high-quality health care system. The eight overarching recommendations in the report are structured around the following key messages:

• Nurses should practice to the full extent of their education and training.
• Nurses should achieve higher levels of education and training through an improved education system that promotes seamless academic progression.
• Nurses should be full partners, with physicians and other health care professionals, in redesigning health care in the United States.
• Effective workforce planning and policy making require better data collection and information infrastructure.

NC is similar to other parts of the US in needing health care improvements. However, this change is more critical for NC due to its rapidly increasing population, now the 10th most populous state, the 8th fastest growing state and at a rate twice as fast as the remainder of the US (US Census, 2010); the disparities in health outcomes as evidenced in the Caucasian infant mortality rate of 5.4 and a minority rate of 14.1 (NC Center for Health Statistics, 2009); many rural areas still without access to health care (Health Resources and Services Administration, 2010); and its rapidly aging population with retirees aging and choosing to move to NC (UNC Institute on Aging, 2010). Improvement in health care and prevention of future health problems are critical issues for NC.
A major part of improving health care in NC is to implement the IOM Recommendations in NC. To this end, the Foundation for Nursing Excellence and key nurse leaders from service, practice and education, plan to call to action a broad base of governmental, healthcare and business leaders across NC through a Statewide Summit for Creating the Future of Nursing and Health Care in North Carolina. This Summit will introduce over 200 thought leaders to these evidence-based recommendations and provide updates on NC initiatives that are currently addressing these IOM recommendations. Attendees will then be involved in a consensus-building process to identify priority initiatives and key components of an action plan, including a timeline and action leaders for moving this critical initiative forward in our state.

The Summit will occur on Monday, April 11, 2011, at the McKimmon Center in Raleigh, NC, a site known for hosting such policy initiatives. Representatives from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Institute of Medicine will keynote the meeting. Ongoing projects such as Regionally Increasing Baccalaureate Nurses (RIBN), an initiative to increase baccalaureate-prepared nurses through a dual entry, seamless educational tract between community colleges and universities levels and an Eastern NC project addressing rural nurse shortages will be presented. Reports from the NC Institute of Medicine and the UNC Sheps Center for Health Professions Research on their efforts to address health workforce needs and initiatives related to health care reform will serve as background. Attendees will then work in small facilitated groups to generate ideas and decide the direction for NC’s future. A final session will prioritize the direction and assign responsibility for implementing each strategy. A follow-up meeting to gage progress toward implementing strategies and refining the plan will occur approximately 6 months after the initial Summit.

Although many nurse leaders are volunteering their time to this initiative, financial support from the healthcare community is needed to support this invitational Summit. The projected cost for the Summit and implementation of an action plan coming out of the Summit is $15,000 to $20,000. We are asking individuals, health care systems, health-related and philanthropic organizations to contribute to this important initiative. With a very short lead time, we need commitments as soon as possible but no later than February 22, 2011 and actual contributions must be received no later than March 4, 2011. The contributions will be managed by the NC Foundation for Nursing Excellence, a non-profit organization with a 501 (C) 3 tax status. Contributions should be made to the NC Foundation for Nursing Excellence, either online at www.ffne.org or mailed to PO Box 31824, Raleigh, NC 27622 with the notation that such funds are to support the Statewide Summit for Creating the Future of Nursing and Health Care in North Carolina. Contributors will also be recognized as partners in transforming nursing and health care at the Summit. For further information, please contact Polly Johnson, President and CEO of the Foundation for Nursing Excellence (919 810-6754 or polly.johnson@ffne.org), Connie Mullinix, Clinical Associate Professor, East Carolina University College of Nursing (919-967-2342 or mullinixc@ecu.edu), or Elaine Scott, Associate Professor, East Carolina University College of Nursing (252-744-6383 or scottel@ecu.edu). Information will also be available at the Foundation’s website at www.ffne.org.