A meeting sponsored by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) on June 29-July 1 was convened to help Action Coalitions working on academic progression to accelerate their progress in rural areas of their states. Teams from 22 states gathered to deepen their understanding of the challenges in rural health and develop creative solutions. The meeting was designed by a planning group led by the Academic Progression in Nursing (APIN) National Program Office and included the Center to Champion Nursing in America (CCNA) staff and rural state representatives. Objectives included allowing participants to:

- learn from content experts who provided exemplars and possible solutions to common workforce issues facing rural health care systems and providers;
- identify action steps through a strategic planning process to accelerate progress on rural health leadership and education issues;
- identify academic progression as a viable strategy in addressing rural health care issues;
- receive technical assistance to move selected projects into statewide initiatives;
- leave inspired with a sense of decreased isolation as viable solutions are identified.

This meeting in Denver was different from other meetings convened by RWJF, APIN and CCNA in that the state representatives were asked to come in three-person teams, each with an identified rural health topic to explore more deeply during the conference. Each team worked to develop an action plan to address the identified need during the course of the three days together, and each left for home with action steps to implement immediately, tailored to address its identified need.

Rural APIN initiatives identified

Examples of topics/needs the state representatives worked on together included providing critical access hospitals with access to RN to BSN education; providing education to faculty and then to students about emerging roles for nurses and the competencies necessary to be successful; full scope of practice authority not just for advanced practice nurses, but for registered nurses in all settings in rural health; including a rural health immersion as part of current academic progression models and expansion into rural areas of the state; designing and offering a free webinar series to rural health nurses to address gaps in education; rural employer engagement in curriculum development; and expansion of existing internships in a rural health system to include leadership training and health prevention. All projects had the goal of creating healthier communities though a better educated and engaged nursing workforce.

The foundation of the conference was grounded in data, value and perspectives about the rural health workforce, patient care needs, the changing health care reimbursement structure, and how cultural humility and cultural competency are characteristics that impact what nurses do and how they do it. Participants were exposed to exemplars from Action Coalition members, APIN, and State Implementation Program representatives from rural states that have successfully addressed issues related to workforce, education and leadership. These exemplars helped to foster dialogue and exchange among the state teams regarding ways these exemplars could inform their action plans and the implementation of creative strategies to meet their specific rural health needs. Cathy Rick, RN, PhD(h), NEA-BC, FAAN, FACHE, retired chief nurse of the Department of Veterans Affairs noted that the recently released book, Realizing the Future of Nursing – VA Nurses Tell Their Stories, also provided exemplars of successful strategies for implementation of the Institute of Medicine recommendations.

In addition to having some fun while formulating state-specific action plans, attendees identified the following areas for further exploration and messaging specific to rural health:

- Connecting the dots between education, leadership and workforce by closing the education gaps through mentoring, value messaging and tool kits to support replication of success;
- The power of partnerships, particularly academic-practice partnerships;
- Utilizing successful rural health models as exemplars to be replicated to transform health care nationally;
- Utilizing the return on investment models shared at the conference to support funding for BSN education in all settings;
- Formalizing connections with national rural health organizations to move this agenda forward;
- Dissemination strategies about the effective work being done.

The state teams left Denver excited and energized to implement their plans to improve rural health.

Academic Progression in Nursing (APIN) collaborates with state Action Coalitions and their partners to accelerate implementation of promising practices that will help states achieve our goals of seamless continuing
academic progression and increasing the number of nurses with a baccalaureate degree to 80 percent of the nursing workforce by 2020. Developing innovative strategies with community colleges, universities and practice partners will ensure that the nursing workforce is prepared to deliver high quality patient care across all practice settings. APIN is a grant initiative of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation in partnership with the Tri-Council for Nursing and administered by the AONE.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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AONE Foundation Emerging Nurse Leader Institute (ENLI)

Sept. 9–11, Indianapolis
Sept. 22–24, Anchorage, Alaska

ENLI helps prepare you for a role in nursing leadership. Find your strengths by exploring topics that bring out your inner leader. This program is intended for staff nurses, charge nurses and nurse coordinators looking to advance their careers. Visit www.aone.org/enli for more information.

AONE Foundation Nurse Manager Institute

Nov. 3–5, Pittsburgh

One of the core concepts of the NMI is appreciative inquiry. Participants explore their leadership potential while focusing on their strengths, and then learn to leverage these methods in their day-to-day practice. Skills such as understanding the basics of budgeting, conflict management, quality and patient safety, and their roles in the future of nursing are developed and are immediately applicable to daily work. Learn more at www.aone.org/nmi.

Nurse Leader Organizations Begin New Affiliate Agreements with AONE

Congratulations to the following chapter organizations that have aligned with AONE under a new affiliation agreement. Each state/regional affiliate will continue to operate independently of AONE, although it will be aligned to support nurse leaders from both a national and local level. Leaders from the affiliates meet twice a year with AONE leaders to share best practices, discuss critical nursing issues and learn about key AONE priorities.

Alabama Organization of Nurse Executives
Association of California Nurse Leaders
Colorado Organization of Nurse Leaders
Delaware Organization of Nurse Leaders
Georgia Organization of Nurse Leaders
Illinois Organization of Nurse Leaders
Indiana Organization of Nurse Executives
Iowa Organization of Nurse Leaders
Kentucky Organization of Nurse Leaders
Louisiana Organization of Nurse Leaders
Michigan Organization of Nurse Executives
Minnesota Organization of Leaders in Nursing
Missouri Organization of Nurse Leaders
New York Organization of Nurse Executives and Leaders
North Carolina Organization of Nurse Leaders
Nurse Leaders of Idaho
NWone (serving Oregon and Washington)
Ohio Organization of Nurse Executives
OMNE: Nurse Leaders of Maine
Organization of Nurse Executives New Jersey
Organization of Nurse Leaders of Massachusetts & Rhode Island
Pennsylvania Organization of Nurse Leaders
South Carolina Organization of Nurse Leaders
Texas Organization of Nurse Leaders
Utah Organization of Nurse Leaders
Virginia Organization of Nurse Executives and Leaders
Wisconsin Organization of Nurse Executives