Participation of nurses in health services decision making and policy development

ICN Position:

Nurses have an important contribution to make in health services planning and decision-making, and in development of appropriate and effective health policy. They can and should contribute to public policy related to preparation of health workers, care delivery systems, health care financing, ethics in health care and determinants of health.

Nurses must accept their responsibilities in health services policy and decision-making, including their responsibility for relevant professional development.

Professional nursing organisations have a responsibility to promote and advocate the participation of nursing in local, national and international health decision-making and policy development bodies and committees. They also have a responsibility to help ensure nurse leaders have adequate preparation to enable them to fully assume policy-making roles.

Background

Because of their close interaction with patients/clients and their families in all settings, nurses help interpret people's needs and expectations for health care. They are involved in decision-making at clinical practice level as well as in management. They use the results of research and trials to contribute to decisions on quality, cost-effective health care delivery. They conduct nursing and health research that contributes evidence to policy development. Because nurses are often coordinators of care provided by others, they contribute their knowledge and experience to strategic planning and the efficient utilisation of resources.

To participate and to be effectively utilised in health planning and decision-making, and health and public policy development, nurses must be able to demonstrate their value and convince others of the contribution they can make. This may involve improving and expanding the scope of the preparation of nurses for management and leadership, including their understanding of political and governmental processes. It may also involve increasing their exposure through management and leadership roles and positions in both nursing and other health care services, encouraging nurses to participate in government and political affairs, and improving and marketing the image of nursing.
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The International Council of Nurses (ICN) and its member national nurses associations (NNAs) promote and support all efforts to improve the preparation of nurses for management, leadership and policy development. This preparation should be broad and must include the development of knowledge and skills for influencing change, engaging in the political process, social marketing, forming coalitions, working with the media and other means of exerting influence. It must recognise the complex processes and factors involved in effective decision-making.

Professional nursing organisations need to employ a number of strategies to contribute to effective policy development, including monitoring the utilisation of nurses in the workforce; incorporating new models and management strategies; continually marketing a positive image of nursing to key management and policy stakeholders nationally and internationally; disseminating relevant knowledge and research; and, continually developing and maintaining appropriate networks to enable collaborative working relationships with governmental and non-governmental organizations. For its part, ICN will promote and make available information regarding the contribution of nursing in health decision-making and policy development.

Adopted in 2000
Reviewed and revised in 2008

Related ICN Positions:
- Management of Nursing and Health Care Services
- Promoting the value and cost-effectiveness of Nursing
- Publicly Funded Accessible Health Services

ICN Publications:
- Health Policy Toolkit, 2007

The International Council of Nurses is a federation of more than 130 national nurses associations representing the millions of nurses worldwide. Operated by nurses and leading nursing internationally, ICN works to ensure quality nursing care for all and sound health policies globally.