

# Q&A with Practice Leaders on the Essentials Task Force

For this issue of *Syllabus*, we asked members of the Essentials Task Force representing the practice community about AACN's recently released [The Essentials: Core Competencies for Professional Nursing Education](#) (see page 2). Throughout the development of the new Essentials, AACN actively engaged practice leaders in the work to re-envision how nurses are prepared to thrive in the healthcare system.

Here are their responses to questions about this new approach to nursing education and the future of health care.



**JILL CASE-WIRTH, MHA, BSN, RN**  
*Senior Vice President  
& Chief Nurse  
Executive  
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## Why is it important for new nurse graduates to have a consistent set of identifiable competencies?

As a nurse executive in the practice environment, and a member of the *Essentials* Task Force, it became apparent how valuable it would be to have standard competencies co-authored and endorsed by academic and practice leaders. The *Essentials* offer a common knowledge, model and framework delineating competency for nursing students, progressing from new graduate of baccalaureate and graduate programs. The guidelines are competency-based, which defines the unique role of nursing in health care, while spanning their career. The new *Essentials* is a transformational framework preparing nurses to remain relevant scholars and innovators in an ever-changing practice environment. The application of this competency-based model with 10 domains of practice bridges the academic to practice environment in a transparent and developmental way that will strengthen the professional practice, performance, and leadership of nurses across the country.

## How can academic-practice partnerships facilitate the implementation of the new *Essentials*?

Academic-practice partnerships are ideal for nurse leaders across the country to utilize as we move forward to implement the new *Essentials*. AACN has created a framework that we have leveraged at Wellstar Health System to prioritize thoughtful experiential learning opportunities, developed innovations in our education models, and improvements in the transition of undergraduate and graduate nursing students. The model will inform us, providing process and outcome measures guiding executive leaders on where we are today and where we need to go to fully adopt the *Essentials*.

The *Essentials* will prompt thought leaders from academia and health care to work together to co-opt competency development and innovate education and experiential learning to prepare the next generation of nurse leaders.

We're going to learn a lot as we sit together, take this conceptual framework, and put it into practice. The *Essentials* values the preparation of nurses and represents a shared commitment to the student, nurse, and advanced degree nurse, while advancing the practice of nursing across the country.



**MARY MORIN, MSN, RN, NEA-BC**  
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## What will be the biggest impact of the *Essentials* on nursing practice?

Using a competency-based education model ensures new graduates have the minimum needed knowledge and skills to perform safely and competently in the practice environment. I believe new graduates will be better prepared for actual practice as they will have demonstrated competency in core "essential" aspects of professional nursing practice.

## Do the new *Essentials* support innovation in nursing education?

I think a competency-based approach is innovative for formal nursing education (e.g, university). The nursing profession has a longstanding history of using competency-based education and training to ensure competency of core knowledge and skills in the practice environment. It is very exciting to see the *Essentials* work aligned with competency-based education in other healthcare disciplines and with the practice environment.

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# Q&A with Practice Leaders on the Essentials Task Force

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*(Practice Representative, AACN Board of Directors)*

*Vice President, Center for Clinician Advancement  
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## What excites practice leaders most about the new *Essentials*?

The most exciting part of the *Essentials* are the competencies themselves. Through the work of the *Essentials*, the practice sites will have clear and realistic expectations of new graduates. Enhancing the partnerships between preceptors and students will promote the application of learning aligned with the overall objectives. This competency model will foster a smoother orientation and should shorten the timeline for the nurse to become proficient in their new role.

## How do the new competency expectations strengthen nursing's professional identity?

The competency model is informed by the nursing practice itself, person-centered care, population health, and personal, professional, and leadership development to ensure a comprehensive approach to care. The enhanced focus on these competencies provides a clear view of nursing/nurses for consumers, patients, interprofessional partners and legislators/regulators. It is our intention that this will promote and advance the impact nurses have on the overall health system. Competency in systems-based practice and information and healthcare technologies puts nurses in the forefront

of the improving healthcare delivery, quality, and costs. The recognition of the expertise and value of nurses across the care spectrum will ensure nurses are “at the table” promoting and delivering on consumers’ needs.



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*(Practice Representative, AACN Board of Directors)  
Chief Nursing Officer*

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## Why are the new *Essentials* transformational?

The *Essentials* were developed in partnership with representatives from academia and practice to provide a contemporary view of what is needed in nursing education in a dynamic healthcare environment. Societal changes, technological advances and rapidly evolving evidence require a higher degree of knowledge and competency to manage in today's complex healthcare system. To address the challenges of preparing tomorrow's professional nurse, the *Essentials* have been developed in a competency-based framework that can be measured by faculty throughout the educational experience. In addition, it provides practice with a clear expectation of what a new graduate has learned in their academic experience. This allows practice to establish learning opportunities to assist in making the new graduates transition more effective.

The worst pandemic in 100 years called on nurses to stand between a raging infectious disease process and the vulnerable patients in their care. Nursing's heroic response demonstrated the unwavering commitment to put patients first. Their ability to unite science

and kindness during the pandemic underscored to all the commitment of the nursing profession. As we look toward the future, the advance preparation of nurses is critical to enable us to continue to evolve as a profession and to maintain the health of our nation. Together academia in true partnership with practice not only advances the preparation of tomorrow's caregivers but strengthens our profession at a time when it is needed most.

## How can educators engage their practice partners in advancing the new *Essentials*?

Practice is an important stakeholder in the preparation of caregivers. For a successful implementation a strong active partnership needs to be developed. As a stakeholder, practice partners should be engaged at the very beginning of planning for implementation with the local nursing program.

- An executive summary should be prepared explaining the development and framework of the essentials. Specifically, practice needs to understand the domains and concepts that support the essentials. An explanation of the two levels of undergraduate and graduate needs to be provided. Finally, the model of competency and sub-competency-based learning should be included.
- A full copy of the *Essentials* should accompany the executive summary to provide more detail of how the domains and competencies are delivered.
- Regular meetings (minimally monthly) to discuss and educate practice about the *Essentials* and progress on curriculum development should be held. Drafts and then a final copy of the curriculum should be provided to the practice partner to help them develop and coordinate clinical experiences.