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 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.

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.

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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

Q&A continued from page 3

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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, and leadership 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. And kindliness 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.