

CHAPTER 1

Welcome

Kathleen Gainor Andreoli, DSN, RN, FAAN, Dean ¹ Rush University College of Nursing

Welcome to Rush University Medical Center and Chicago. During the symposium the audience will listen to real stories from students with disabilities who attended nursing school, position paper presentations, responses to the papers, and audience discussions. We will then work together on strategic recommendations in the areas of education, employment, licensure and regulations for qualified students with disabilities entering the nursing profession.

Thank you to the organizations that contributed financial and in-kind support, the speakers and task force members for all the work you did bringing the symposium together.

Larry J. Goodman, MD² President and Chief Executive Officer Rush University Medical Center

Today, you will be discussing and thinking about an extremely fundamental question, which is, "What does it take to be a nurse?" This

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² Larry J. Goodman, MD, is the President and CEO of Rush University Medical Center, Chicago. In 1979, he was the chief resident in Internal Medicine at Rush and completed a fellowship in infectious diseases. His research has focused on infectious diseases, particularly gastrointestinal infections in HIV-positive patients. He is recognized for promoting innovations in medical education and has written extensively about medical education curricula and how students select a specialty for residency training.

is a critical question because it is time to consider what are the requirements to be a nurse; what are the requirements for training; and what are the requirements necessary to be a functioning, effective nurse on a patient care floor, in clinics, in education; and all the other areas in which nurses function?

This is an important, profound question, much like the question that led to a revolution in medical education. Over the past twenty years, medical colleges have examined what they call technical standards, the sorts of abilities that a person needs to be a functioning physician, whether it's communication abilities, functional abilities, or motor abilities. It is important to say what the standards are, and more important, why we have those standards, because physicians are educated and trained into niches and specialties of practice. You do not want an infectious disease specialist to perform your surgery. Physicians do not pretend to be able to do all aspects of medicine. There may be some things in the field of nursing that some people can and others cannot do, and this is already true. So the question is what are the requirements for training and where can people best fit in?

It would be a mistake to say that this is the right time to examine this question because of the shortage of nurses. The question resonates more broadly now because of the nursing shortage, but that is not the issue at all. The issue is not whether there is a glut or shortage of nurses.

Today is a day to begin to answer what the training requirements are for a registered nurse. Technical standards need to be identified and broadened. The harder questions are in the details; what are the restrictions, if any; what are the requirements for admissions; what are reasonable requirements; what are reasonable accommodations?

One last point: This is absolutely a question for the profession of nursing. First, decide for yourself and then bring the rest of us along with you.

David K. Hanson, Commissioner³

Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities

Hello, and welcome to the great city of Chicago. This symposium is about creating opportunities: creating opportunities for people to go to college and study in the field of their choice, creating opportunities for all people to dedicate themselves to careers in a healthcare profession, and creating opportunities for people with or without disabilities to realize their goals and accomplishments. And most of all, for creating opportunities for people to live the life they choose.

For many people, career opportunities are limitless, while for people with disabilities, career opportunities are few. This symposium is a major first step in correcting such an injustice. During the symposium, speakers and participants will invest their time, talent and expertise to explore new ways to remove existing barriers in the admission, education, training, recruitment and hiring practices—all of this will serve to increase the number of people with disabilities in the nursing profession.

However, in order to make this goal a reality, a number of other policies and procedures need to be implemented to remove existing barriers for people with disabilities in areas of transportation, education, healthcare, and housing. The City of Chicago and Mayor Richard M. Daley realize and understand these barriers and are committed to doing something about it. Recently, Mayor Daley signed an executive order creating a Mayoral Task Force on Employment of People with Disabilities to address the unacceptably high unemployment rate among people with disabilities of working age, which is approximately 70 percent. The goal of the Task Force is (at a local level) to bring the employment rate of people with disabilities as close as possible to the employment rate of people without disabilities.

The Task Force is commissioned for three years and it is unprecedented in that it is the first of its kind at a municipal level. It represents public and private sector partnerships and is composed of

³ Commissioner David K. Hanson was responsible for Chicago's unique accessibility review, which requires builders and developers to demonstrate that their plans meet all accessibility guidelines even before city of Chicago building permits are issued, a model that other cities emulate.

more than 100 members from the business, the economic development, disability and civic communities. It also has commitment from all levels of city government, as well as its sister agencies, the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA), the Chicago Public Schools, the Chicago Housing Authority and the Chicago Park District.

There are five work groups, each addressing a specific employment-related goal. Two of the symposium speakers, Marca Bristo and Robin Jones, are Work Group leaders who have worked with their respective Work Group members in developing a strategic plan to address barriers. Using these findings and recommendations, Chicago's municipal government will make sure, from a structural and employment program standpoint, that employment policies are acceptable to all people with disabilities. All professions and disciplines must internally examine their respective employment and education policies and resources to develop solutions for removal of these barriers in order to advance people with disabilities in their workforces.

That's why I applaud Rush University College of Nursing and the Medical Center for organizing and hosting this vitally important symposium. The work you have done and continue to do is desperately needed and will be appreciated by the future generation of youth with disabilities who want to have careers and not just jobs, but careers in the nursing profession.