

Students with Disabilities: Nursing Education and Practice

Proceedings Manual

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Students with Disabilities: Nursing Education and Practice

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Preface

In Fall 2000, nurse members of the Rush University Medical Center Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Task Force began to address the needs of qualified people with disabilities who were interested in nursing careers. Persons with disabilities have generally been overlooked in serving the health care field. The issues revolved around reasonable accommodations and faculty support required for a student with disabilities to successfully complete a college of nursing program, and successfully pass a state licensure exam. Historically, nursing has been seen as a career requiring considerable physical function and strength. However, much of what the modern nurse accomplishes is done through cognitive function — assessment, problem solving, education, counseling and evaluation. The nurses from the Rush ADA committee presented the topic to the Dean's Office at Rush University College of Nursing. The Dean agreed to further explore the issues.

Initially, Rush College of Nursing explored feasibility issues on the topic of students with disabilities and nursing education on a local Chicago level by hosting a series of exploratory discussions with nurse administrators, nurse educators and experts in the area of disability advocacy and policy. From these preliminary discussions, those involved realized they had to continue the study and discussion of this important topic at a national level.

To that end, a select group of nursing educators, health care administrators, legal and health policy experts, and representatives of national disability rights organizations and advocacy groups, were invited to a symposium to address the issues related to the recruitment of people with disabilities into the nursing profession. There were 117 experts in attendance. The symposium was held on April 10 and 11, 2003, at Rush University College of Nursing in Chicago. Nineteen distinguished experts in nursing education, licensure, employment, health policy and legal aspects of disability rights and accommodations delivered the presentations which featured discussion and debate on recruiting qualified students with disabilities into the nursing profession.

The implications for accommodating nursing curricula and employment, regulations and licensure and the related impact on nursing colleges and employers could not be adequately discussed in a two-day

period. Thus, five priority issues were selected, starting with a student-faculty panel featuring students with disabilities. Three of the four students had successfully completed nursing programs and licensure exams, and were employed as registered nurses; one student was completing her final semester. The topics were: legal aspects of accommodations, nursing education curricula and accommodations, nursing employment and accommodations, regulations, licensure and policy, and a “perspective on how to effect change.”

Each of the five experts was asked to present a position paper on one of the topics listed above, and five other experts were asked to respond to the paper corresponding to their expertise. Audience participants were invited because of their expertise on the topics either at the local, regional or national level. Following the formal presentations, all conference participants were invited to comment on the presentations. Subsequently, the author of each position paper was allowed time for questions, rebuttal or additional comments. The sessions were informative and spirited. On the second day of the conference, all participants divided into one of three groups: education, employment or regulations/licensure. In these break-out sessions, each group brainstormed a chosen topic and made recommendations for accommodating qualified persons with disabilities in the nursing profession.

The symposium and proceedings manual were made possible through the cooperative effort of professionals dedicated to bringing to the public relevant knowledge about students with disabilities and their ability to become registered nurses. The following are symposium task force members who contributed by writing and reviewing chapter drafts: Sarah Ailey, PhD, RN; Kathleen Gainor Andreoli, DSN, RN, FAAN; Stacey Carroll, PhD (c), APRN, BC; Lois Kazmier Halstead, PhD, RN; Margaret Faut-Callahan, DNSc, RN, FAAN; Jane Grady, PhD; Jane Llewellyn, DNSc, RN; Beth Marks, PhD, RN; Karen McCulloh, RN; and Kathy Pischke-Winn, MBA, RN. A special thanks to Ellen Hunt for her editorial advice.

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We hope that the information and recommendations in these proceedings will be used as a guide by nursing colleges, health care delivery organizations, nursing regulatory representatives and persons with a need to know to take concrete steps in modifying nursing curricula, employment, regulations, licensure and policy for qualified persons with disabilities to allow their inclusion into the nursing profession.

Please note: Arial black font was used in publishing the proceedings. This was done as an accommodation, making it easier for a person with a visual disability to be able to read the report.

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