

The Jefferson Doctor of Nursing Practice Degree

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In 2004, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) decided to move the level of preparation for advanced practice nurse (APN) roles from the master's to the doctoral level.¹ AACN also called for educating APNs and other nurses seeking top leadership and clinical roles in Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) Programs. AACN envisions the DNP degree as the terminal degree for advanced nursing practice by 2015.

AACN outlined the benefits of the Doctor of Nursing Practice as follows:

- Developing needed advanced competencies for increasingly complex practice, faculty and leadership roles;
- Enhancing knowledge to improve nursing practice and patient outcomes;
- Enhancing leadership skills to strengthen practice and health care delivery;
- Better matching of program requirements and credits and time with the credential earned;
- Providing an advanced educational credential for those who require advanced practice knowledge but do not need or want a strong research focus;
- Enhancing the ability to attract individuals to nursing from non-nursing backgrounds; and
- Increasing the supply of faculty for practice instruction.²

The Jefferson School of Nursing (JSN) is one of over 70 schools nationwide that offer a DNP degree. In September 2007, Jefferson welcomed its first cohort of 18 DNP students, representing a wide variety of practice specialties, including acute care, primary care, healthcare administration, population health, education and industry. Twenty students comprise the second cohort entering in September 2008.

The DNP program at JSN is an inter-professional education experience that prepares professional nurses at the highest level for advanced practice in clinical practice, administration or policy. Through a variety of practica, courses, and on-line learning experiences, the program prepares leaders who can evaluate the evidence base for care and facilitate the translation and integration of research into quality care to improve patient outcomes, deliver the highest standard of care, influence health care policy, and work skillfully as members of inter-professional teams.³

Preparing advanced practice nurses is a key strategy to mitigating the predicted impending shortage of healthcare professionals, particularly in rural communities. In July 2007, JSN was awarded federal funding to expand its graduate education programs. A portion of this funding allowed for the extension of the new DNP program beyond the reach of its urban Philadelphia campus to the JSN campus at Geisinger Health System in Danville, PA. (Danville is in Montour County, the smallest county in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.) Previously, JSN's rural campus offered one undergraduate program. The grant allowed four of the initial cohort of DNP students to participate in classes via a combination of web-casting and live video over the Internet.

This change in professional education for nurses, while innovative, is not without controversy. Some concerns have been raised by the American Medical Association (AMA) surrounding the scope of practice for nurses with the DNP credential. In April 2008 the National Board of Medical Examiners announced it would develop a voluntary DNP certification exam based on the same test physicians take to qualify for a medical license.⁴ In June the AMA proposed two resolutions to protect the titles of "doctor," "resident," and "residency," and DNP supervision stipulations.⁴ Continuing dialogue will be needed to respond to some of these concerns.

Educational institutions and nurses themselves continue to discuss the impact of the DNP degree and what it will mean to advanced practice nursing, to the institutions that prepare nurses for practice, and to the profession as a whole.¹ Jefferson School of Nursing is meeting the challenge of educating the next generation of nurses to fully participate in evolving complex healthcare delivery systems.

Information on Jefferson's DNP program can be accessed at: <http://www.jefferson.edu/jchp/nursing/dnp.cfm>.

References

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