

ENVISION YOUR **TAKING THE** NURSING FUTURE **NEXT STEP** IN YOUR NURSING EDUCATION





Education is the key to a career in specialty practice.

Dear Student,

On behalf of the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) and the National Organization for Associate Degree Nursing (N-OADN), we commend your interest in advancing your education. It is through knowledge that we grow as professionals and in turn, the patient, his or her family, and the community truly benefit from our enhanced understanding of nursing science, healthcare systems, and quality outcome measures. Now is the time to focus on developing a cadre of nurses who are ready to meet the changes and challenges that will come with reform to our nation's healthcare delivery system.

In 2010, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Institute of Medicine released a landmark report, *The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health*. This report was commissioned to investigate what role nurses will play in addressing the increasing demand for safe, high-quality, and effective health care. After thoroughly investigating current trends and evidence-based research, the report outlined four key messages that include:

- Nurses should practice to the full extent of their education and training.
- Nurses should achieve higher levels of education and training through an improved education system that promotes seamless academic progression.
- Nurses should be full partners, with physicians and other healthcare professionals, in redesigning health care in the United States.
- Effective workforce planning and policy making require better data collection and an improved information infrastructure.

AACN and N-OADN believe that academic progression is critical to the growth of our profession and each individual nurse. Serving as leaders for the profession's educational infrastructure, AACN is the national voice for baccalaureate and graduate nursing education programs, representing over 700 schools of nursing, and N-OADN is recognized nationally as the voice for associate degree nursing, representing community college nursing programs and individual members. Our organizations are committed to increasing students' awareness of potential career pathways and have developed this tool to present the facts about nursing programs and advancing your education. The decision to pursue higher education is one that each nurse must consider and weigh individually as he or she evaluates the impact they would like to make on the lives of America's patients and the healthcare system. Our organizations believe that all nurses should embrace lifelong learning.

Jane Kirschling, DNS, RN, FAAN

President

American Association of Colleges of Nursing

Donna Meyer, RN, MSN

President

National Organization for Associate Degree Nursing



Education is the key to a career in nursing research.

What are Your Educational Options?

If you are currently in an Associate Degree Nursing (ADN) program or are an associate degree-prepared Registered Nurse (RN) and would like to continue your education, there are two main paths to travel. The RN to Baccalaureate or RN to Master's program.

RN to Baccalaureate Programs

RN to Baccalaureate (BSN, BS or Bachelor of Science in Nursing) programs build on initial nursing preparation with course work to enhance professional development, prepare for a broader scope of practice, and provide a better understanding of the cultural, political, economic, and social issues that affect patients and influence care delivery. Specific knowledge that students will acquire in these programs includes leadership development, a research background to inform practice, and a deeper understanding of community and population health.

Currently, there are over 640 RN to BSN programs available nationwide, including more than 400 offered at least partially online. Program length varies between 1 to 2 years depending upon the school's requirements, program type, and the student's previous academic achievement. The list of RN to BSN programs is available on the AACN website at: <http://www.aacn.nche.edu/research-data/RNBSN.pdf>.

RN to Master's Degree Programs

The second option for ADN students or associate degree-prepared RNs is the RN to Master's (MSN, MS or Master of Science in Nursing degree) program. The baccalaureate level content missing from ADN programs is built into the front-end of the RN to MSN program. Mastery of this upper level basic nursing content is necessary for students to move on to graduate study. Upon completion, many programs award both the baccalaureate and master's degrees, while some only confer the master's degree. These programs prepare nurses to assume positions requiring graduate preparation, including roles in administration, practice, and as Clinical Nurse Leaders.

Currently, there are more than 170 programs available nationwide to transition RNs with associate degrees to

the master's degree level. Though the majority of these programs are offered in traditional classroom settings, some RN to MSN programs are offered largely online or in a blended classroom/online format. RN to MSN programs generally take about 2 to 3 years to complete with specific requirements varying by institution and the student's previous course work. The list of RN to MSN programs is available on the AACN Web site at <http://www.aacn.nche.edu/research-data/RNMSN.pdf>.

Master's degree-prepared nurses are in high demand as expert clinicians, nurse executives, clinical educators, health policy consultants, and research associates.

Is Doctoral Education Right for You?

Once you have completed your master's program, you may be looking for opportunities that would allow you to obtain advanced leadership positions in research or practice. Therefore, a doctorate would be the appropriate credential for you. There are two doctoral programs focused on either research (PhD, DNS) or practice (Doctor of Nursing Practice or DNP). Nurses with doctoral degrees have an array of career options including providing care as Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs), assuming faculty roles, embarking on careers as research scientists, and pursuing leadership roles in the healthcare arena. Those seeking a terminal nursing degree should consider these offerings:

Doctor of Nursing Practice

The DNP is designed for nurses seeking the highest level of preparation in nursing practice. Both post-baccalaureate and post-master's DNP programs are available with more than 150 nursing schools currently offering this degree. DNP graduates are leaders in the health system and work collaboratively with nurse researchers to implement new nursing science and practice innovations. The length of these programs will vary based on whether the student is full or part-time. For more information, see: <http://www.aacn.nche.edu/dnp/program-schools>.

Research-Focused Doctorate

The PhD represents the highest level of formal education for a career in research and the scholarship of discovery. Program graduates develop new nursing



Education is the key to a career as nurse faculty.

science, serve as leaders of the profession, and educate the next generation of nurses. In the academic setting, the PhD is required for success as a researcher in any discipline, including nursing. In the scientific arena, the PhD is the beginning preparation for the development of independence in scientific pursuit. Attainment of the PhD (or the DNS degree at some institutions) requires a strong scientific emphasis within the discipline; an understanding of the science of related disciplines and translation science; dissemination of innovations; and interprofessional collaboration. Currently, more than 120 nursing schools offer a research-focused doctorate. The length of these programs will vary based on if the student is full or part-time.

Career Options for those with Advanced Education

Once you have completed your master's or doctoral degree, a number of career options are open to you! Listed below are only a few.

- **Advanced Practice Registered Nurses** provide primary, preventative, and specialty care in a variety of roles in acute and ambulatory care settings. Those considering a career as an APRN may choose from one of four recognized roles: *Nurse Practitioner*, *Clinical Nurse Specialist*, *Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist*, and *Certified Nurse-Midwife*.
- **Nurse Researchers** are scientists who investigate ways to improve healthcare services and patient outcomes.
- **Nurse Educators** combine clinical expertise with a passion for teaching.
- **Clinical Nurse Leaders (CNLs)** are prepared in master's degree programs to oversee the care coordination for patients, assess risks, develop quality improvement strategies, facilitate team communication, and implement evidence-based solutions at the unit level.

- **Nurse Administrators** serve in a variety of managerial and leadership capacities in all practice environments.
- **Public Health Nurses** focus on preserving the health and well-being of the public.
- **Nurse Informaticists** seek to improve information management and communications in nursing to maximize efficiency, reduce costs, and enhance the quality of patient care.
- **Public Policy:** Nurses in this arena work to shape public policy at the federal, state, and local levels.



Financing Advanced Degrees

These websites include information on financing your education.

<http://bhpr.hrsa.gov/scholarshipsloans/index.html>

<https://www.noadn.org/n-oادن-foundation/foundation-awards-scholarships-and-grants.html>

<http://www.aacn.nche.edu/students/financial-aid>

<http://www.minoritynurse.com/scholarships>

Other Helpful Sites

<http://www.aacn.nche.edu/ccne-accreditation>

<http://www.nlnac.org/home.htm>

<http://www.aacn.nche.edu/students/your-nursing-career>

<https://www.noadn.org>