

Professional Nursing Organizations

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LEARNING OUTCOMES

After reading this chapter you will be able to:

- Describe the purposes of professional nursing organizations.
- Analyze the importance of matching the mission of the organization with the members' expectations.
- Describe at least three different professional nursing organizations and their missions.
- Identify three member benefits associated with professional nursing organizations.
- Explain how nursing organizations advocate for nursing and quality patient care in the political arena.
- Consider individual career plans and the function of professional nursing organizations in advancing career development.

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Introduction

One of the characteristics of a profession is the existence of a professional culture that fosters the values and ethos of the profession among its members. This professional culture is commonly nurtured and maintained through the actions of the profession's organizations (Matthews, 2012). Professional organizations are developed to collectively advocate on behalf of their members and other constituents, publicly representing the core values of the nursing profession to others.

Nursing's first professional organization was founded in 1893 as the American Society of Superintendents of Training Schools for Nurses; today this organization is known as the National League for Nursing. Three years later, in 1896, a second nursing organization was founded, the Associated Alumnae of Trained Nurses of the United States and Canada, which evolved into the American Nurses Association (ANA). In 1899 these two nursing organizations were joined by a third organization, the International Council of Nurses, the first international professional nursing organization. Today, these historic and venerable nursing organizations remain vibrant and influential in nursing and health care and are now joined by more than 100 national professional nursing organizations, as well as growing numbers of international nursing organizations (Matthews, 2012). Together, these professional organizations constitute the “voice of nursing” in a variety of professional, political, regulatory, clinical, and educational matters.

KEY TERM

Professional nursing organization:

A collective entity of nurse members that has as its purpose enhancement of some element of patient care or the nursing profession.

KEY TERM

Membership: The state of being a member or person in a group, in this case, a professional nursing organization.

This chapter provides an overview of **professional nursing organizations**, describing the various types of nursing organizations and the purposes they serve in advancing the nursing profession. This chapter also provides information about the many types of professional nursing organizations that exist and describes the benefits of **membership** for individual nurses, the profession, and the public. Specific information about a select number of professional nursing organizations is provided. How professional nursing organizations can serve as a vehicle for the career development of the individual nurse, beginning in nursing school, is also presented. Motivating factors for joining nursing organizations are addressed.

The Nature of Professional Nursing Organizations

Professional nursing organizations are an effective means by which the nursing profession can influence healthcare policy, represent and protect the interests of nurses, provide continuing education opportunities for nurses, and advocate for the highest quality care possible to the public. The many professional nursing organizations provide a variety of foci to match the interests of nurse members. For example, the

ANA is the largest of all the U.S. professional nursing organizations, representing the nursing profession and interests of 3.4 million nurses. The ANA's stated mission is "nurses advancing our profession to improve the health of all" (ANA, 2016a).

In contrast, there are many specialty nursing organizations that support the interests of nurses who practice in specific clinical environments. Examples of such specialty organizations include the Oncology Nursing Society (ONS), the Emergency Nurses Association (ENA), and the American Association of Critical-Care Nurses (AACN). There are also professional nursing organizations that are focused on specific roles of nurses. Examples of these include the American College of Nurse-Midwives (ACNM), the American Association of Colleges of Nursing, the National League for Nursing (NLN), the National Association of Clinical Nurse Specialists (NACNS), and the American Organization of Nurse Executives (AONE). The Nursing Organization Alliance (www.nursing-alliance.org) is a coalition of 64 nursing organizations that collaboratively address issues of interest to nursing. Although it is not a comprehensive listing of all nursing organizations, a review of their membership list can provide the reader with an understanding of the many different types of professional nursing organizations and the diversity of their missions.

The Mission and Impact of Professional Nursing Organizations

Professional nursing organizations provide the opportunity for nursing as a profession to influence nursing practice, nursing education, health policy, and healthcare standards. There are multiple facets to these membership organizations that contribute to changes in the profession and provide a collective means by which nurses can be involved in shaping healthcare policy. Individual membership in nursing organizations also helps nurses stay current about issues that affect their specific practice area and nursing role. Participating in professional organizations can facilitate leadership development, develop skill in collaboration, provide networking opportunities for each member, and potentially result in career advancement. **Box 5-1** summarizes the types of mission focus that professional nursing organizations can have.

To fulfill their mission, nursing organizations further the development of nursing **standards of practice**, expand the body of knowledge through research and evidence-based practice, and promote nurses' general welfare in the workplace. Nursing organizations also provide **continuing nursing education**, foster the continued development of nursing as a profession, and serve as legislative and political advocates for nurses and those served by nurses. The organizations may be local, regional, national, or international in scope. Many national and international nursing

KEY TERM

Standards of practice: The criteria against which professional practice is measured.

KEY TERM

Continuing nursing education: Ongoing education that nurses take part in after they have achieved basic preparation and licensure.

BOX 5-1 MISSION FOCUS OF PROFESSIONAL NURSING ORGANIZATIONS

- Nursing as a profession
- Clinical specialties role function (e.g., nurse educator, administrator, researcher)
- Collective bargaining
- Political advocacy and lobbying
- Healthcare policy

organizations have local or regional affiliates or chapters, making it possible for members to participate in and attend organization-sponsored events in their community. Sigma Theta Tau International Nursing Honor Society (STTI) is an example of an international nursing organization with a presence in over 85 countries with approximately 500 chapters worldwide.

The organization's mission statement provides insight into the purpose and objectives of the organization. For individual nurses who are seeking a professional organization that corresponds with their interests, examining the organization's mission statement is a first step in determining if the organization is a potential match.

Mission Statements

Each professional organization has a mission statement, which indicates the organization's primary purpose(s) and drives the development of the organization's strategic plan and priority goals for that specific organization. For example, the AACN has as part of its mission statement, "Acute and critical care nurses rely on AACN for expert knowledge and the influence to fulfill their promise to patients and their families. AACN drives excellence because nothing less is acceptable" (AACN, 2016). It follows that one of AACN's high-priority activities is meeting the continuing education needs of its members who practice in acute and critical care environments. The National Student Nurses Association (NSNA) has as its mission "to mentor students preparing for initial licensure as registered nurses, and to convey the standards, ethics, and skills that students will need as responsible and accountable leaders and members of the profession" (NSNA, 2016). This statement makes it clear what the NSNA's priority goals are so that members understand that they can expect to gain information to help them take the first steps toward professional practice and leadership. **Contemporary Practice Highlight 5-1** provides additional information about NSNA.

When deciding which professional organization(s) to join, each nurse must determine whether his or her reasons for professional membership match the stated mission of the organization (see **Box 5-2**). If there is not a similarity in objectives, the member can be disappointed and not perceive any value in belonging to the organization. It can be helpful to have conversations with other nurses in

CONTEMPORARY PRACTICE HIGHLIGHT 5-1**NATIONAL STUDENT NURSES ASSOCIATION**

The National Student Nurses Association (NSNA) was founded in 1952 as a nonprofit organization with a purpose of promoting the professional development of nursing students in diploma, associate, baccalaureate, and generic graduate nursing student programs. Today the NSNA has grown to have over 60,000 members in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The NSNA is led by a national board of directors consisting of nursing students elected from member schools who have chapters. Many

nursing leaders begin their professional leadership development by joining their school chapter of the NSNA as students and serving as leaders within the organization. The experience they gain as leaders in their student organization provides them with the opportunity to develop foundational leadership skills that they can continue to develop as they transition from the student role to the role as a practicing nurse. More information about NSNA and membership benefits and opportunities can be found at www.nsna.org.

BOX 5-2 REASONS FOR JOINING PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

- Advocate for the profession
- Participate in continuing education programs
- Lobby for changes in healthcare policy
- Pursue networking opportunities
- Stay current in clinical specialty or role
- Develop leadership skills
- Access resources to support career development

the workplace to determine which professional organizations they belong to and for what reasons. Most of the professional nursing organization websites have abundant information about not only the mission of the organization but also strategic direction, recent activities, and member benefits (Greggs-McQuilkin, 2005). This information is very useful in finding the best match to support the nurse's own career objectives.

Professional Nursing Organizations with Clinical, Political, and Regulatory Focus

Nursing provides many professional career options representing many opportunities for individuals to specialize. Career options are widely diversified not only by these many specialty opportunities but also by role functions. For example, there are nurse researchers, nurse educators, nursing care providers, clinical nurse

specialists, nurse practitioners, nurse informaticists, and administrators, to name just a few. Overlaid upon each of these role functions is usually at least one, or perhaps more, clinical foci. This section provides an overview of the many types of nursing organizations in existence, including those with a clinical, political, and regulatory focus.

There are professional nursing organizations whose primary mission is to support distinctive nursing role functions. The NACNS, the American Association of Nurse Anesthetists, National Association of School Nurses, the National Nursing Staff Development Organization, the NLN, and the American Association of Nurse Attorneys are just a few of the nursing organizations that support a specific role function within the profession. The NSNA created to support nursing students in their role as learners has state chapter affiliates with local chapters established within schools of nursing. For nurses whose primary role is focused on nursing research, there are several regionally organized nursing research societies—the Southern Nursing Research Society, Midwest Nursing Research Society, Western Nursing Research Society, and Eastern Nursing Research Society—with a purpose of promoting nursing research. There are also nursing organizations that support both a role within a given clinical focus, including the National Association of Nurse Practitioners in Women’s Health, the National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners, and the American Pediatric Surgical Nurses Association.

Clinical Focus

Many nursing organizations are structured around a particular clinical specialty area and include within their mission political, advocacy, regulatory, and professional purposes related to the clinical area. Examples of clinically focused professional organizations include American Psychiatric Nurses Association, Society for Vascular Nursing, Academy of Medical-Surgical Nurses, and National Association of Orthopaedic Nurses. Part of the mission of a **nursing specialty organization** is to enhance the health of patients in their care.

KEY TERM

Nursing specialty organization: A professional nursing organization that has a particular clinical focus.

Connection to a clinical specialty organization ensures up-to-date practice information for the specific population of patients that the nurse cares for, helping him or her to optimize the quality of care delivered. To fulfill this purpose, the nursing organizations may create a wide variety of practice and educational resources. These resources can take many forms including standards of practice, evidence-based practice guidelines, research projects, protocols, educational seminars, and publications such as practice and scholarly journals. Many of these educational resources have migrated to online formats and webinars in an effort to promote wide dissemination of the resources to members, reduce cost to the members

and/or their organization, and provide easy and timely access for busy nursing professionals with difficult scheduling needs. Continuing nursing education is often included in the resources to assist members in maintaining needed contact hours for licensure and specialty credentialing. A few organizations, such as the ONS and the AACN, offer specialty credentialing known as **certification** in their respective specialty, signifying the nurse has achieved a level of excellence in practice. **Box 5-3** summarizes the types of professional resources provided by organizations to their members.

KEY TERM

Certification: A designation earned by a person to ensure that he or she is qualified to perform a task or job.

Political Focus

Nursing as a profession has a responsibility to society, with a specific aim to improve the health of the nation. Professional nursing organizations fulfill the obligation of nursing to support improved health outcomes in national and global environments in several different ways. Many international and national organizations support work at the state level through local chapters, sections, or some form of alliance. In the United States, the ANA is the largest professional nursing organization that represents the views and needs of its members in various policymaking arenas. All nurses can become members of the ANA through membership in their state nursing associations.

Through ANA's political and legislative program, the organization has taken action on such issues as adequate reimbursement for healthcare services, access to health care, and appropriate nurse staffing ratios. The ANA also has programs focused on the health and safety of the individual nurse and nursing profession. The ANA "Healthy Nurse" and "Healthy Nurse, Healthy Nation" programs promote health habits such as sleep, physical exercise, managing stress, getting screenings, and living smoke-free lifestyles for nurses. See Chapter 12 for more information on the importance of caring for oneself by promoting a healthy lifestyle.

BOX 5-3 TYPES OF PRACTICE AND EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES FROM PROFESSIONAL NURSING ORGANIZATIONS

- Standards of practice
- Policy (position) statements
- Evidence-based practice guidelines
- Research project priorities and protocols
- Grant funding
- Safe and healthy work environments
- Health maintenance programs for nurses
- Practice and scholarly journals
- Conferences, seminars, webinars
- Continuing nursing education credits
- Specialty credentialing (certification)

Box 5-4 lists some of the areas in which ANA has recently presented congressional testimony on behalf of the nursing profession. A complete listing of policy and advocacy activities can be found on the ANA website at www.nursingworld.org. State nursing associations also engage in policy and advocacy activities at the state government level, thus allowing nurses to influence legislation related to nursing and health care in their own states.

Regulatory Focus

Specialty organizations also have a responsibility to support regulatory efforts in the areas of both healthcare reform and professional practice for the purposes of protecting the public's health and safety. For example, the National Council of State Boards of Nursing is a primary regulatory body in nursing. NCSBN is a not-for-profit, independent organization governed by a board of directors and a delegate assembly representing 59 member boards of nursing, which include the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and four U.S. territories—American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, and the Virgin Islands. Some states have separate boards of nursing for RNs and LPN/VNs, which brings the total of NCSBN member boards to 59.

The purpose of the NCSBN is to provide an organization “through which boards of nursing act and counsel together on matters of common interest and concern affecting public health, safety and welfare, including the development of nursing licensure examinations” (NCSBN, 2016). NCSBN develops the NCLEX-RN and NCLEX-PN examinations and therefore has a large role in the regulation of nursing licensure in the United States. The NCSBN also provides resources for boards of nursing to support them in their roles of regulating nursing education and practice in their respective states and territories. Additionally, the NCSBN is a leader in providing national expertise to regulatory issues that affect nursing practice such as telehealth and interstate practice (NCSBN, 2016). See Chapter 4 for more information about the NCLEX-RN examination and Chapter 3 about nursing licensure.

BOX 5-4 AMERICAN NURSES ASSOCIATION POLITICAL ADVOCACY ACTIONS

- Health and Environment
- Healthcare Reform
- Registered Nurse Immigration
- Nurse Workforce Development Program (Title VIII) Funding
- Safe Patient Handling
- School-Based Health Centers

Data from American Nurses Association. (2016b). Policies and advocacy. Retrieved from <http://nursingworld.org/MainMenuCategories/Policy-Advocacy>

Professional Organization Membership and Involvement

Nurses represent the largest number of healthcare workers in the United States, and as such, have the potential to wield significant influence in shaping healthcare reform in this country. Historically, however, the voice of nursing in these national discussions has not been representative of the numbers of nurses in the profession, and the potential for nursing's contributions to advancing the health of the nation has not been realized (Ashton, 2012). Concerns about the lack of nursing representation on national healthcare boards has led to an initiative to secure the placement of 10,000 nurses on national boards by the year 2020 (see **Contemporary Practice Highlight 5-2**).

Addressing the concern about the lack of nursing leadership in health care, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) *Future of Nursing* report (2011) called for the nursing workforce to be prepared to lead change in health care. The IOM report specifically recommended that professional nursing organizations assume a role in developing nurse leaders by providing mentoring and leadership development programs and providing opportunities to develop leadership skills by assuming leadership roles within the organizations.

All nurses are expected to be leaders and the nursing profession needs to consider strategies by which to build the leadership capacity of nurses, including new graduates (Galuska, 2012; Scott & Miles, 2013). One strategy is to encourage membership in professional nursing organizations. Individual nurses can assume responsibility for developing their own leadership competencies by becoming members of professional nursing organizations and taking advantage of volunteer opportunities to become involved in the organization's activities (Galuska, 2012; Ross, Fitzpatrick,

CONTEMPORARY PRACTICE HIGHLIGHT 5-2

10,000 NURSES BY 2020 NATIONAL INITIATIVE

The Nurses on Boards Coalition is an initiative that includes representation from national nursing and other interested organizations who have joined together to increase the presence of nurses on health-related boards in corporations and nonprofit organizations. Launched in 2014, the coalition aims to place 10,000 nurses by the year 2020 on a variety of boards and commissions that focus on health-related topics. Achieving

this goal would increase nursing's presence and leadership on influential decision-making bodies. The ultimate goal of the initiative is to "improve the health of communities and the nation through the service of nurses on boards and other bodies."

Data from Nurses on Board Coalition. (2016). 10,000 nurses by 2020. Retrieved from <http://www.nursesonboardscoalition.org>

Click, Krouse, & Clavelle, 2014). A study by Catallo, Spalding, and Haghiri-Vijeh (2014) demonstrated that professional nursing organizations can play a key role in engaging nurses in nursing and healthcare policy issues.

If nurses are not represented in national and international discussions related to health care, someone else would surely speak for them. The involvement of professional nursing organizations in all aspects of health care and political forums ensures that nurses represent the interests of nurses. By being a member of a professional organization, not only are nurses supporting the ability of professional associations to participate in these important forums, but in some cases, the individual nurse has the opportunity to provide specific testimony and be the voice at the table. Nurses can be called on to provide expert information on anything related to practice and the profession. An example is testifying in the local or national legislature on a specific health issue, such as universal access to care.

There are a number of activities in which a nurse can become involved as a member of an organization. Task forces and workgroups, leadership positions, and liaison and authorship opportunities are some common examples of contributions that nurses can make to an organization, at the same time developing their own leadership competencies.

Task Forces and Work Groups

Many times, professional associations need members with specific expertise to represent them in groups external to the organization, as well as groups or task forces within the organization. These small groups of expert members may develop standards of practice for a specialty, for example. They may also create evidence-based guidelines for practice or develop a position statement. Depending on the structure of governance within the organization, designated small groups may be advisory panels that make recommendations for the strategic direction of the association. In any of these situations, members have the opportunity to play a key role in setting practice or direction for the organization, and in many instances, the nursing profession. The members in these groups also have the advantage of networking with other experts in the field through their participation in these activities and becoming a nationally or internationally known expert in the field over time.

Leadership

Members of a professional organization have abundant leadership opportunities. Often, nursing organizations are seeking volunteer members for a myriad of positions. Organizations need volunteer members to help plan events such as annual or regional meetings or to review abstracts or grant submissions. Chair positions are available for task forces and committees at both the national and local levels. Participating initially at the local level is an excellent way to become involved and to learn more about the organization. Such involvement can then naturally lead to participation at the state and national level. Members can progress from local

or chapter leaders to eventually becoming a member of the board of directors. Although time consuming, leadership activities provide tremendous opportunity for recognition and also become very important for creating future career opportunities.

Liaison Activity

Frequently, nursing organizations require someone with a specific expertise to represent their particular interest to other organizations. For example, the APRN Consensus and Licensure, Accreditation, Certification, Education (LACE) initiatives were developed through the involvement of liaisons from numerous nursing organizations. Liaison activity often extends beyond nursing associations to other healthcare-related entities. The March of Dimes, for example, may request representation from Association of Women's Health, Obstetric, and Neonatal Nurses (AWHONN) or ACNM on issues related to prevention of preterm labor or standards of care for mothers with preterm labor. The possibilities are as diverse as the healthcare environment; leadership opportunities for members of professional nursing organizations are considerable.

Authorship Opportunities

Nursing organizations provide many resources, including professional journals, to their members and others. These professional journals provide opportunities for nurses to author manuscripts. Authors submit their manuscripts to editors for publication in the journals. Depending on the intended purpose of the journal, these manuscripts may be original research or practice related. Members are often solicited to author textbooks, monographs, and position statements as well. Educational resources created by a professional nursing organization are most often written by a membership group, and this is an opportunity for new authors to be mentored in publishing. The writing opportunities are many for members who choose to share their practice innovations and new research findings.

Summary

A large number of professional nursing associations exist that are aligned with many important purposes within the nursing profession, including clinical, political, and regulatory foci. There is a nursing organization to meet the needs and interests of any individual nurse, and these organizations can be matched to specialty, role function, or nursing in general, as is the case with the ANA.

Professional nursing organizations provide many important functions that sustain the profession and provide opportunities for professional development. Membership in professional organizations offer many benefits including professional journals, continuing education, certification, networking, specialty standards, and leadership development. Organizations also provide input to active political forums and represent their members' views in various healthcare and political arenas. It is imperative that nurses participate actively in their nursing organization to ensure the best for themselves as a profession and the best health outcomes for their patients.

Reflective Practice Questions

1. Select a professional nursing organization that you are interested in joining following graduation. How does the organization's mission support your philosophy of nursing care and your own professional development needs?
2. What motivates you to join a professional organization? What would you consider to be some of the barriers that might lead you to not pursue organizational membership?
3. How does nurses' participation in professional nursing and other healthcare organizations benefit patient care?

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