



# Your Career as a Nurse Educator

by Jean E. Bartels



**M**y first exposure to teaching students came early in my career while I was working as a critical-care nurse. As a preceptor on a clinical unit, I provided students with their first exposure to nursing theory and science applications in real health care settings. Students looked to me as a teacher and mentor to guide them as they took their initial steps toward becoming confident and highly competent health care providers.

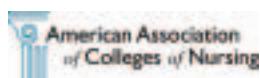
From the beginning, I was hooked. I loved helping students transition from the academic to the practice setting, and there is no greater professional reward than knowing that your work is directly impacting the future of the nursing profession.

My career as an educator and dean in university settings has allowed me to focus my expertise on practice, teaching, research, and scholarship. I have enjoyed unique opportunities to contribute to nursing's knowledge base, influence national health policy, publish articles, and motivate future generations of nurses. I find it very stimulating to work alongside nurses who are dedicated to advancing the profession through scholarly inquiry and research.

## Careers in Nursing Education

Teaching is an integral part of nursing, so becoming a nurse educator is a natural step for many of you. Whether they work in the classroom or the practice setting, nurse educators prepare and mentor patient care providers and the future leaders of our profession. They play a pivotal role in strengthening the nursing workforce, serving as role models, and providing the leadership needed to implement evidence-based practice and improve patient outcomes.

Nurse educators typically express a high degree of satisfaction with their work. Mentoring students and watching them gain confidence and skills are particularly rewarding aspects of their jobs. Other benefits include access to cutting-edge knowledge and



Representing more than 575 schools nationwide, the American

Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) offers programs and services to meet the needs of deans, faculty and students enrolled in baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral programs in nursing. The association works to improve the quality of our nation's health care by preparing a well-educated nursing workforce. AACN advances nursing education, research, and practice by setting curriculum standards, building coalitions, providing services to students, supporting faculty and dean development, advocating for federal support, collecting data to shape public policy, pursuing grant-funded initiatives, publishing reports, and reaching out to the media.

research, opportunities to collaborate with health professionals, an intellectually stimulating workplace, and a flexible work environment.

Given the growing shortage of nurse educators, the outlook is bright for nurses interested in careers in academia. As documented by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN), nursing schools nationwide are struggling to find new faculty to accommodate the rising interest in nursing among new students. (AACH, 2004a) The shortage of nurse educators may actually enhance the career horizon for new recruits, since it affords a high level of job security and opportunities to advance quickly up the career ladder.

Nurse educators serve in diverse roles that range from adjunct (part-time) clinical faculty to deans of nursing schools. Other career options in nursing education include: associate dean, professor, clinical nurse educator, administrative nurse faculty, staff development officer, and continuing education specialist. Though the greatest need is for full-time faculty members, a growing number of nurse educators teach part-time while working in the clinical setting, which allows them to maintain a high degree of clinical competence while sharing their knowledge with novice nurses.

Nurse educators also enjoy opportunities to conduct research, publish articles in professional journals, speak at nursing conferences, serve as consultants to education and health care institutions, write grant proposals, shape public policy, and participate in community service. Nurse educators typically love variety, and they flourish in an environment that allows them to be innovative, independent, and visionary. In fact, practically no two days are the same. Some are devoted to classroom teaching or clinicals, while others are spent mentoring and counseling students, preparing papers for publication, or developing lectures and teaching plans. Analyzing data, advocating for health policy reform, networking at national meetings, serving on committees, and sharing nursing knowledge with a variety of health care constituents, are other typical responsibilities. This wonderful diversity is very attractive to nurses looking to combine intellectual and creative pursuits with clinical expertise.

Nurse educators typically teach in nursing schools, but they can also work in hospitals, public health agencies, education associations, and other community settings where the link between lifelong learning and professional competence is recognized. Within the school setting, there are as many options as there are schools. Educators may teach on a rural, suburban, or urban campus; at a major private university or local community college; as part of a certificate program in a teaching hospital; or as a research coordinator in a doctoral program. The choice is truly yours when it comes to deciding where to teach.

Though most teachers do not point to salary as the deciding factor in their career choice, it is an important consideration. The opportunities for financial success in teaching are great. Salaries vary by level of education, rank, and institution, with the most lucrative positions offered to doctorally-prepared faculty teach-

ing in public nursing institutions.

In 2003-2004, AACN found that salaries for full-time nurse faculty in public institutions were as high as \$176,000 for a professor with a doctoral degree, and \$124,000 for an assistant professor without a doctorate, illustrating that faculty with doctoral preparation earn significantly higher salaries than master's-prepared educators. (AACN, 2004b) This holds true across the board in all types of nursing institutions.

## Preparing for the Educator Role

The preferred credential for teaching in the academic setting is the doctoral degree. Doctoral programs prepare nurses to assume the full faculty role and open doors to leadership opportunities and higher salaried positions. At a minimum, nurse educators at colleges and universities must hold a master's in nursing and should have additional training in the science of teaching. Some practice settings will allow experienced nurses prepared at the baccalaureate level to teach nursing students in clinical and professional development courses, often in collaboration with experts who have graduate degrees.

AACN reports that there are currently 92 doctoral programs in nursing available nationwide, including 86 research-focused (PhD, DNSc, DSN) and 6 clinically-focused programs (DNP, ND). An additional 13 doctoral programs in nursing are currently under development. (AACN, 2004c) Dozens of baccalaureate-to-PhD programs are also available for nurses prepared with a bachelor of science in nursing (BSN) looking to pursue doctoral preparation. These programs, which include intense clinical experiences, move students through graduate level study at an accelerated pace. (See box on p. 44)

Many postgraduate certificate programs prepare nurses specifically for the educator role, and focus on the skills needed to prepare advanced

practice nurses to teach. These include instruction on the learning process, curriculum development, student counseling, program evaluation, the principles of adult education, and teaching strategies for active learning.

“Education Scholar” is an online program supported by AACN which strengthens teaching expertise for new faculty and graduate students preparing for faculty roles. This self-paced, seven-module program includes readings from professional literature and reflective exercises.

Nurse faculty tend to specialize in areas that correspond with the concentration in graduate nursing education programs and their area of clinical expertise. Those considering a teaching career may choose from dozens of specialty areas, such as: acute care, cardiology, family health, oncology, pediatrics, and psychiatric/mental health.

There are many federal and private sources of funding for graduate nursing education. The recently passed “Nurse Reinvestment Act” includes a student loan repayment program for nurses who agree to serve in faculty roles after graduation. Similar programs are also available through the National Health Service Corps and the Bureau of Health Professions.

As part of its national *Campaign for Nursing’s Future*, Johnson & Johnson (J&J) is working with NSNA to increase the amount of financial aid available for students looking to become nurse educators through the Promise of Nursing Regional Faculty Scholarship Program. J&J has held regional fundraising events over the past three years to collect money specifically for nurses wishing to complete graduate programs in order to teach.

I find the nurse educator role to be a rich and rewarding career choice that allows me to combine clinical expertise with a passion for teaching. I believe that good clinicians make good teachers provided they have a strong foundation in the science of teaching. Nurse educators must possess a

solid clinical background, strong communication skills, and a high level of cultural competence in order to succeed. Educators must be lifelong learners, and flexible enough to adapt curriculum and teaching methods in response to innovations in nursing science and ongoing changes in the practice environment. ☺

## Tips on Baccalaureate to Doctoral Programs

**For those considering a fast-track baccalaureate to doctoral degree program, the following are some points to consider:**

- Baccalaureate to doctoral programs provide an efficient pathway to careers as nurse educators, researchers, and leaders for the best and brightest nursing students.
- According to AACN data, the first baccalaureate to doctoral degree program was offered in 1995 by the University of Texas Health Science Center – San Antonio.
- The number of programs has grown steadily over the last 9 years, from 1 program in 1995, to 8 programs in 1999, to 45 programs today. According to AACN’s 2003 annual survey, 9 additional schools are planning to launch new baccalaureate to doctoral programs.
- Typically, top BSN students are identified prior to graduation and encouraged to pursue this rigorous program, which prepares them for research and academic careers.
- Strong clinical experiences are embedded throughout the entire 4-5 year program, building on the strong foundation students receive in their BSN programs.
- These programs are available to both BSN nurses in practice as well as new graduates. They are rigorous, and full-time study is strongly recommended.
- These programs are bringing younger faculty into nursing, which helps address the nurse educator shortage and the rapid aging of the nursing professoriate.
- Students considering baccalaureate to doctorate programs are encouraged to look for institutions and faculty expertise that matches their academic and research interest areas.
- A complete list of bachelor’s to doctoral degree programs is available at [www.aacn.nche.edu/Education/pdf/BSNPHDPrograms.pdf](http://www.aacn.nche.edu/Education/pdf/BSNPHDPrograms.pdf).

(Source: American Association of Colleges of Nursing Data and Research Center, 2004.)

## resources

AACN is committed to providing resources and support to nursing students considering careers as nurse educators. The organization’s newly redesigned web site, [www.aacn.nche.edu](http://www.aacn.nche.edu), includes a wealth of information for future faculty, including:

- A complete list of doctoral nursing programs, including program contacts and web links
- A financial aid resource section for graduate students
- Details about “Education Scholar,” an online faculty development program
- Facts and figures on the nurse faculty shortage, including a comprehensive white paper and an updated fact sheet

- Faculty Career Link section that includes a listing of faculty vacancies nationwide.

## references

American Association of Colleges of Nursing (2004). *Nursing Shortage Fact Sheet*. Washington, DC: Author.

American Association of Colleges of Nursing (2004). *Nursing Shortage Fact Sheet. 2003-2004 Enrollment and Graduations in Baccalaureate and Graduate Programs in Nursing*. Washington, DC: Author.

American Association of Colleges of Nursing (2004). *2003-2004 Salaries of Instructional and Administrative Nursing Faculty in Baccalaureate and Graduate Programs in Nursing*. Washington, DC: Author.



**Jean E. Bartels, PhD, RN,**

is president of the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN), Washington, DC. She received her diploma in nursing from the Columbia Hospital School of Nursing in 1970. She went on to receive

her BSN in 1981 from Alverno College and her MSN from Marquette in 1983, and was awarded her PhD in Nursing from the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, in 1990. She currently serves as the Chair of the School of Nursing and Professor of Nursing at Georgia Southern University, Statesboro, Georgia. Dr. Bartels is a regional, national, and international consultant in many areas, including outcome and performance assessment, the accreditation processes, and community based nursing education.