



The need for professional nursing to reflect the growing diversity in today's society reaffirms the goals of NSNA's Breakthrough to Nursing project. The BTN Committee chose this year's theme, "A Profession Moving Forward Through the Door of Diversity," to support BTN goals of increasing recruitment/retention of minority groups within the nursing profession, and increasing faculty awareness of the needs of minority students. To celebrate the upcoming 40th anniversary of the BTN project, we can look back at the past and recent history of Breakthrough to Nursing.

BY VERNICE FERGUSON

"NURSING: A PROFESSION MOVING FORWARD THROUGH THE DOOR OF DIVERSITY"

# Breakthrough to Nursing

## Guidelines for the 21st Century



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NSNA made a bold step forty years ago when the organization created and implemented the "Breakthrough to Nursing (BTN) Project." A truly innovative program for its time, this far-reaching initiative set the stage for recruiting minorities into nursing and improving the quality of health for underserved populations.

As NSNA members celebrate BTN's 40th Anniversary and reflect on the health care environment of 1965, we can paint a picture of a society struggling to address issues related to desegregation. Most registered nurses at that time were graduates of hospital-based diploma programs; however, establishing schools of nursing in four-year colleges and universities was an important trend taking place at this time. Beginning in 1952, the number of nursing departments in community colleges increased, giving more students access to nursing education closer to home. Desegregation of educational institutions in the mid 1950s led to the closing of many predominately black diploma nursing programs, and ultimately to a decline in the number of black nursing students, as this may have actually limited their access to professional nursing education. Although institutions of higher learning reformed their admission policies to comply with desegregation laws, most did not actively recruit minorities into their schools. This important fact was the impetus behind the creation of the Breakthrough to Nursing Project in 1965.

In the 1960's, most health care was delivered in hospitals, where the majority of nurses worked. Intensive

and coronary care units and kidney dialysis centers were opening nationwide. Continuing education programs and in-service training prepared RNs to practice in these new clinical settings. Later, in the 1970s, academic institutions offered master-level degrees in specialty nursing practice, and nurse practitioner and clinical nurse specialist programs were developed. In addition, nursing led the way for quality assurance programs long before other disciplines were similarly engaged.

Hospitals were also desegregated and there was interest by the federal government to fund the education of health care professionals. This funding led to federal grants awarded to the NSNA Breakthrough to Nursing Project to develop methods to recruit minorities into nursing.

Today, in this great nation of immigrants, the white majority is rapidly disappearing, and it is predicted that by mid-century, America will become a nation of minorities. The growing elderly population will outweigh our youth and as our nation's demography shifts, culturally competent care becomes even more crucial. It is essential that nursing students lead the way in this pursuit. Following are some guidelines for nursing care to take us well into the future:

### Eliminate Health Care Disparities

More attention must be given to eliminate health care disparities in large segments of our society. Limited access to health care services by many populations and lack of quality treatment for certain conditions are not acceptable. Nursing leadership is required now and in the future to provide equitable health care to all in need.

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## Assure Appropriate Care of the Elderly

With the aging of the baby-boom population, knowledgeable and highly skilled nurses are needed in larger numbers to meet the growing imperative for care of the elderly. Here again, nursing leaders must be fully engaged to provide adequate nursing resources to meet the

impending need in geriatric services for all populations.

## Assure Responsive End-of-Life Care

The final script for the provision of end-of-life care has yet to be written. Nursing leadership in the area of palliative, hospice and end-of-life care is essential.

## Develop and Disseminate Models of Team Care

Nurses are proud of their ability to function in teams and to deliver holistic, patient-centered care. As key decision makers, nurses must be role-models engaging other disciplines in team efforts to provide high quality care to all in need.

## Provide Leadership in Health Promotion and Disease Prevention

Nurses and nursing students play an integral role in health promotion and disease prevention. Community-based programs in areas with insufficient access to public health services are prime target areas for health promotion demonstration projects. Extensive opportunities exist for nursing students and faculty to serve as role models and leaders in designing collaborative programs in this area.

Today's times demand bold change in the health care delivery system, and you have to be committed to reshaping health care. The opportunity is yours to make a discernible difference in the life of those whom you are privileged to care for. The choices that you make to ensure high quality health care services to all populations in need must be as memorable and far reaching as "Breakthrough to Nursing." ©

### resources

[www.qualitytools.ahrq.gov/disparitiesreport/download\\_report.aspx](http://www.qualitytools.ahrq.gov/disparitiesreport/download_report.aspx).

The National Healthcare Disparities Report, developed by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, represents the first national comprehensive effort to measure differences in access and use of health care services by various populations.

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