

Focus On: Achieving Your BSN

[VIDEO TRANSCRIPT]

Hi, welcome to this presentation on achieving a Bachelor of Science in Nursing. I'm Lisa Bonsall the clinical editor for Lippincott's Nursing Center. The issue of educational level for entry into nursing practice has been debated for many years even as early as 1965. Why is this an issue? Our profession is one of the largest contributors to health care in the United States and yet as a group we are the least formally educated. To change this, a shift from skills training education to academic learning is necessary and recent research demonstrates the benefits of nurses having BSN degrees. RNs with bachelor's degrees make a difference in outcomes especially in lowered rates of death and failure to rescue. In her landmark study, Dr. Linda Aiken found that a 10% increase in the proportion of hospital staff nurses with baccalaureate degrees is associated with a five percent decline in mortality following common surgical procedures. Van den Heede et al. also found that increasing the number of BSN prepared nurses on the unit resulted in a decrease in hospital mortality. Another study by Blegen et al. looked at the effects of education level on nurse sensitive outcomes. They found that hospitals with a higher percentage of RNs with baccalaureate or higher degrees had lower rates of mortality from congestive heart failure, hospital acquired pressure ulcers, failure to rescue, and post-operative deep vein thrombosis or pulmonary embolism, as well as a shorter length of stay. After a two-year collaborative effort in October of 2010, the Institute of Medicine and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation released the report *The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health*. This report calls for nurses to achieve higher levels of education and to practice as full partners with other health care providers including physicians. Recommendations include increasing the percentage of RNs with baccalaureate degrees from 50% to 80% by the year 2020. The IOM committee feels this is both an achievable goal and also a necessary step to meet workforce competency and capacity requirements. Hospitals and nursing organizations are

paying attention to the evidence supporting the BSN and the future of Nursing report. There are anecdotal reports of hospitals hiring only BSN prepared nurses or requiring nurses that don't have a BSN to get one. A study on changing trends in new graduates published in the American Journal of Nursing in February 2014 comments on unpublished calculations that BSN graduates are significantly more likely to work in hospitals within six to 18 months of graduation than associate's degree graduates. It's also important to note that Magnet designation requests 75% or more of nurse managers in the institution to have a BSN degree or higher. We need to address the challenges of returning to school for a BSN in order to come up with strategies to overcome them. Time and money are the biggest barriers reported in the literature. In a nursing management survey in 2011, 70% of respondents who want to go back for a higher degree can't because of financial concerns. Other barriers that were reported included family issues, lack of organizational support, older age, and lack of financial incentive to obtain the degree. So how can we manage these work-life balance and economic issues to facilitate a return to school for your BSN? The results of a series of focus groups are published in the April 2014 issue of the Journal of Nursing Administration. Nurses discuss certain incentives and supports that would facilitate them getting a BSN. These included funding or financial support from their employer such as increased tuition benefits, financial compensation, or a bonus when they completed their degree. Other potential incentives that arose from discussion were credit for clinical experience, study groups, book exchanges, flexible scheduling, and easier access to education through hospital-based classes. Family support was also recognized as an important component. Are you ready to do this? Aside from the IOM report, the evidence, barriers and incentives, think about the personal benefits: personal satisfaction, autonomy, critical thinking, professional growth and the potential for increased pay. You can and should start exploring options for obtaining your BSN. Assess BSN programs by checking out brochures, websites, and marketing materials. Consider how you learn best. Is an online program right for you? Do you prefer to be in a classroom? Ask other nurses who are back in school about their experiences. Here are some tips for success. Don't wait for the perfect time to go back to school. Get started today. Assess financial

options for support. Find out about tuition reimbursement, loans and grants. See what financial aid or scholarships are available. Solicit support from those around you. Talk to your manager about flexibility with scheduling, connect with others who have completed their BSN or who are in a program now and tell family and friends about your goals and needs. Take advantage of technology. Find ways to access the tools you'll need. For example, a computer or internet access and learn how to use them and finally schedule time for yourself. Make sure to eat well, stay hydrated and get adequate rest. I'd like to leave you with this quote: "Nurses at all levels should expect that they'll forever be students of nursing. Accept this responsibly and engage the challenge". Good luck to you as you start the journey to achieving your BSN.