

Position Statement

FUNDING FOR NURSING EDUCATION RESEARCH

NLN Board of Governors
May 18, 2002

The National League for Nursing (NLN) believes that there is an urgent need to provide significant funds to support research that will build the science of nursing education. Such a science should address questions related to student learning, new pedagogies, graduate competencies, program outcomes, innovative clinical teaching models, effective student advisement strategies, recruitment and retention strategies, and other elements of quality nursing education. In addition, this science should be multi-method and built in a systematic way.

The National League for Nursing (NLN) believes that a science of nursing education will be built only if all of the following components are in place. First, we must have nurse educator scholars who can design programs of research that address one or more of the *NLN's Priorities for Research in Nursing Education*. Second, those scholars must have substantial funding from Federal, State, regional, local, institutional, and organizational programs to support their lines of investigation. Third, institutions of higher education must value pedagogical research and view it as a legitimate form of nursing scholarship. Finally, we must have a well-prepared cadre of individuals whose practice as faculty is evidence-based and supported by quality research, and who continually raise new questions about that practice that are in need of study.

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BACKGROUND

Just as the health care arena is changing at an unprecedented pace, so, too, is higher education. The student population is increasingly diverse, technology is altering the way students and teachers interact with one another and with the material to be learned, the amount of information students are asked to integrate has increased at a phenomenal rate, and the public is demanding greater accountability from institutions of higher learning that their graduates be capable of assuming the demanding roles for which they have prepared.

In nursing, these challenges are compounded by a lack of qualified teachers to design innovative curricula and carry out the full scope of the faculty role, as well as the need to prepare students for a health care world that cannot be known. Without adequate research to underlie changes that need to be made in curriculum design, teaching/learning strategies, the use of clinical preceptors and other components of the nursing education experience, faculty may implement approaches that fail to adequately prepare graduates for practice in today's (and tomorrow's) fast-paced, ever-changing, unpredictable, ambiguous health care world.

Sadly, this is happening in many schools of nursing. What are intended to be innovative ways of dealing with changing student populations, technological advances, limited clinical learning experiences, and other challenges often end up being "stop-gap" measures, or "band-aids," that may not adequately address the real issues. And until there is adequate funding to support quality research in nursing education, all we may ever be able to do is provide "stop-gap" measures or "band-aid" solutions. Systematic research is needed to determine why some innovations are effective and, thereby, provide for evidence-based nursing education. New pedagogies and a science of nursing education are needed to respond to these challenges. At precisely the time when faculty most need to increase their pedagogical literacy and expand their teaching skills to respond to the challenges of contemporary teaching and health care environments (such as those described by Heller, Oros, & Durney-Crowley, 2000), funds to support research in these areas are disappearing.

THE NEED FOR FUNDING FOR NURSING EDUCATION RESEARCH

Diekelmann noted recently (2001, p. 340) that "when the Act of Congress granted funding to the National Center for Nursing Research (now the National Institute for Nursing Research or NINR), it specified that no funding could be used for research in nursing education. This has created a virtual moratorium on research in nursing education," since researchers who are committed to pursuing pedagogical investigations must seek funds from outside the discipline, funds for which there already is extensive competition.

Doctoral students who wish to conduct research in nursing education are not eligible for National Research Service Award (NRSA) support. In addition, less than 20% of the doctoral programs in nursing offer students the opportunity to focus on research in nursing education, perhaps because of philosophical beliefs, perhaps because they do not have the faculty to guide such research, and perhaps because such an emphasis holds no promise of bringing in large grants to the institution.

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As a result of this situation, the pool of future nursing education scholars is shrinking drastically, and there are only a handful of new doctoral graduates available to sustain the work of building the science of nursing education. We see few faculty who are able to implement a substantial program of research that focuses on nursing education. We see few large national studies on issues of concern to nursing education. And the findings of many of the pedagogical studies that are conducted cannot be generalized to groups beyond those included in the study sample itself.

What all this ultimately means to nursing education is that just when we need to **know more** about how to design and deliver innovative programs that meet the learning needs of diverse students, incorporate the latest technological innovations, fully embrace expert nursing clinicians as partners in the educational endeavor, improve learning climates, and graduate individuals who can function effectively in a new health care environment, we are **learning less and less through research**.

This situation can change dramatically if there were more funds to support substantive research in nursing education that will lead to the ongoing development of the science of nursing education and if there were more nursing education scholars to provide leadership in developing this science. Indeed, it has been noted that, "As a discipline, [we] must recognize the need for some portion of our academic community to be scholars and researchers in education. ... We [also] must ask who will develop the science of nursing education over the next decades?" (Tanner, 1999, p. 51).

THE ROLE OF THE NATIONAL LEAGUE FOR NURSING

The NLN has a history of supporting nursing education research and, since 2000, has increased the amount of funds it allocates each year toward efforts to build the science of nursing education. The time has come, however, for a broader base of support for such efforts, as well as for significantly increased funding.

As the nursing organization committed to quality nursing education that prepares the nursing workforce to meet the needs of diverse populations in an ever-changing healthcare environment, the National League for Nursing (NLN) has a responsibility to provide leadership in changing the landscape related to funding for nursing education research. In light of its goal to "lead in promoting evidence-based teaching in nursing and the ongoing development of research that informs and improves nursing education," the NLN will do the following:

Recommendations for Faculty:

- Educate Congress and the public about the need to restore funding for research in nursing education through the Reauthorization Act of the Division of Nursing
- Work to establish research in nursing education and the advancement of the science of nursing education as a national priority
- Continue to provide its own funds to support nursing education research
- Actively promote the *Priorities for Research in Nursing Education* as the focus for building the science of nursing education
- Develop an online repository of nursing education research literature and related studies

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- Encourage and assist schools of nursing to support faculty becoming nursing education scholars who are committed to researching new pedagogies in nursing education
- Encourage and assist schools of nursing to develop climates that value and facilitate nursing education research

REFERENCES

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