

COVID-19: Data to Move Healthcare Forward



In March 2020, the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) was set to embark upon an ambitious research agenda, including a national study of patient safety that would enroll hospitals from around the country. However, in the weeks that followed, that plan was no longer viable. The world was in the midst of a full-fledged pandemic, and hospitals were grappling with a new reality: how to provide care for a virus scientists knew little about, maintain sufficient personal protective equipment to keep staff safe, and accommodate the rising number of patients on the doorsteps of their emergency departments.

It was at this point that we at the NCSBN shifted our priorities. We knew we would be remiss if we did not use the current situation to study the effects of the pandemic on the many aspects of nursing regulation. Our new research agenda included a national study of what was happening in prelicensure nursing education programs, the effects of executive orders on advanced practice registered nurse (APRN) practice and safety, the effects of employment practices such as the hiring of student nurses and retired licensees, the use of simulation on licensed practical nurses/licensed vocational nurses, education during COVID-19, and the global impact of COVID-19 on regulatory bodies around the world. Coincidentally, we were also in the midst of conducting our biannual National Workforce Study—data that certainly would be needed if we were to later assess the impact of the pandemic on the nursing workforce.

Given the immense part that the pandemic has played across the globe over the past 3 years, NCSBN decided to devote the first “Special Issue” of the *Journal of Nursing Regulation* to studies that investigated the impact of the pandemic. Although some may think these data are just of historical significance, as you

read this issue, you will discover that there is much to be learned from these studies and that many changes should be made permanent, such as giving APRNs full practice authority. If APRNs are safe to practice without oversight or collaborative practice agreements during a healthcare crisis, why would full practice authority not be safe during ordinary times?

Along with this special issue are two supplements. One describes an extensive study undertaken by NCSBN on the impact of COVID-19 on prelicensure nursing education. This is perhaps the largest study of prelicensure nursing education during the pandemic. More than 50 schools across the United States participated. Data were collected from both students and faculty, and the supplement captures the outcomes of didactic and online education and in-person, face-to-face, and virtual simulation. Also being released with this issue is NCSBN’s National Nursing Workforce Study. This supplement compiles the most comprehensive data collected on the nursing workforce since the height of the pandemic. It describes a dramatic decline in the number of nurses in the workforce and is a call to action for healthcare leadership.

As the thrust of the pandemic wanes, the lessons learned, as described throughout this special issue and the supplements, should serve us for years to come. The *Journal of Nursing Regulation* is proud to contribute to this long-lasting effort.

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