NCSBN’s President Reflects on 25 Years in Regulation

After 4 years, Jay P. Douglas, RN, MSM, FRE, CSAE, is completing her term as president of the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN). This coincides with her retirement as the Executive Director (ED) of the Virginia Board of Nursing (BON). Jay is the first NCSBN president to be an internationally educated nurse and a naturalized citizen. This background has given Jay a unique lens and an international perspective that has not only helped her navigate challenging state and national issues but also prepared her to address the global issues she would encounter as president of NCSBN. Given her experience, knowledge, and nontraditional pathway into regulation, I interviewed Jay about her tenure as executive officer and NCSBN president and her reflections on the past and future of nursing regulation.

Unlike most U.S. regulators, Jay was educated in Australia at The Royal Perth Hospital/Western Australia School of Nursing. After graduation she worked in Australia for a year and a half before leaving her home, traveling to the U.S., passing the NCLEX, and obtaining a staff nurse position in Los Angeles, California. I asked Jay about her experience as a young nurse traveling to the U.S. and her challenges as an internationally educated new graduate.

The biggest challenges of working in the U.S. were learning new terminology and the trade names of medications, which differed from the terms used in Australia. Pain management was different as well. In the U.S., pain was treated primarily with medications. In Australia, we used more preventive and holistic nonpharmacologic methods to treat pain. Coming from Australia, however, did have its benefits. I had much more clinical experience than my U.S. counterparts. For that reason, the hospital I worked in floated me to many different units and specialty areas and I was able to gain extraordinary experience as a new graduate.

After a short time in Los Angeles, Jay moved to her current home state of Virginia and worked in an acute care hospital as a manager on a medical-surgical unit that included a substance use disorder treatment program. She then worked as an administrator of a home care agency with 10 branches throughout Virginia. For 10 years she volunteered for the Virginia Nurses Association peer-assistance program where she represented nurses before the Board of Nursing. This would eventually lead her to a staff position with the Virginia BON as the deputy for discipline. She served in this role for 3 years, and in 2002 she was appointed the executive director (ED) for the Virginia BON.

I asked Jay, in the 25 years she has been a regulator, what are the most remarkable changes she experienced?

In terms of licensure, the automation of our licensure systems and, of course, the Nurse Licensure Compact and APRN compact, which really extend the accessibility of nurses, their mobility, and the jobs they are able to do.

NCSBN’s Nursys Database, which captures the licensing and disciplinary information on all the nurses in this country, has been a remarkable addition to nursing regulation. This did not always exist, and now we wonder how regulators could have done without it. Its establishment has allowed regulators to know more about the nurses they are Licensing, brought public protection to a new level, and allowed regulators to communicate with one another.

I also think there have been significant changes in nursing education. Students receive much less clinical education now than in the past. And of course, the growing use and adaptation of simulation.

Overall, one of the most positive changes is the fact that regulation is no longer done in isolation. There is much more collaboration with practice and education.

In August 2020, Jay was elected president-elect of NCSBN’s Board of Directors and was looking forward to 2 years in that role before transitioning into the role of president. Three weeks into the role, however, Jay found herself stepping into the role of president when the newly elected president resigned. This was only 5 months after the COVID-19 pandemic hit the United States. While trying to juggle the increased and new responsibilities of regulating during a pandemic, especially balancing executive orders and waivers with public protection, she also had to manage the responsibilities of being president at NCSBN. I asked Jay if this was one of the greatest challenges of her career.

Definitely one of them, and balancing the two positions of ED and president of a national organization for 4 years was definitely a challenge. However, there are many challenges in regulation, and...
because of them, regulators learn how to adapt and adjust to the circumstances.

Jay went on to describe the other types of challenges regulators experience:

- State government structures are very challenging. There is limited flexibility and resources to make the kind of changes you want to see.

- State BON members come onto the board, usually with little background in regulation. It is important that they get a good orientation and the knowledge and resources they need. Going along with that is right-touch regulation. Regulating the right amount at the right time.

After she shared her reflections on the past, I asked her to turn to the future. What should the regulators of today be thinking about and anticipating for the future?

- Different models of care delivery for all types of nurses, including assistive personnel. How does the regulation of practice fit with those models?

- Maximizing the workforce. If we believe in practicing to the full extent of one’s education, then that applies to all roles. We need to ask ourselves, “Are we maximizing our workforce for the future?”

- Regulators also need to ask themselves whether they are being too prescriptive, and we all need to continue to build a collaborative network with education and practice so the work we do is synchronized.

Given her experience and the wisdom she has gained throughout the past 25 years, I asked her what advice she has for new executive officers taking on the role.

The ED is like the conductor of an orchestra. The conductor doesn’t play all the instruments but understands them and their role in the music being played. My advice is hire good people who can do the job and rely on them as experts. As ED, you coordinate it all to ensure everyone is in tune with one another and their timing is in sync.

The other advice I will share comes from Corrine Dorsey, one of the early founders of NCSBN. As an ED of a BON, you do not need to make snap decisions. You have the advantage of time. Time to research the situation, look at the evidence and decide the best course of action. Don’t be influenced by anyone else’s timeline.

I ended the interview by asking Jay what, over the course of the past 25 years, she is most proud of.

- Probably first and foremost, my role as ED at the Virginia BON. I built a really strong team and cultivated good leaders and ensured there were staff who could be my successor and carry on the work of public protection.

- Second, my role as president of NCSBN. I came in during a tumultuous time and had the role twice as long as expected. Yet, I balanced both jobs very well. I listened, led by example, and played an important role in moving the organization forward.

- Finally, I cannot forget one of the most important things I am most proud of... I was an author on three articles for JNR. I am proud that I have played a role in contributing to the literature and building the knowledge of nursing regulation.

And that seemed like the perfect note on which to end the interview.

Jay, thank you for your insight and wisdom and for 25 years of service to regulation and NCSBN. Best wishes from JNR!

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