The DNP Project Can Catalyze Nurses to Become Health Policy Leaders

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What Is in the News About Health Care?

01 Quality Measures

02 The Opioid Crisis

03 Health Care Funding/ Health Care Access

04 Legislation Granting the Authority to Practice Nursing/Scope of Practice

05 Social Determinants of Health
Health policy refers to decisions, plans, and actions that are undertaken to achieve specific health care goals within a society. An explicit health policy can achieve several things: it defines a vision for the future which in turn helps to establish targets and points of reference for the short and medium term. It outlines priorities and the expected roles of different groups; and it builds consensus and informs people” (World Health Organization, n.d., para. 1).
A Call to Action for Nurses in the United States

- “Because nursing care poses a risk of harm to the public if practiced by professionals who are unprepared or incompetent, the state, through its police powers, is required to protect its citizens from harm. That protection is in the form of reasonable laws to regulate nursing. State legislatures delegate many enforcement activities to state administrative agencies. In the case of the nursing profession that delegation is to boards of nursing. The charge from the state to the board of nursing is to protect the public.”

- “The practice of nursing is a right granted by a state to protect those who need nursing care. The guidelines of the NPA [sic Nurse Practice Act] and its rules provide safe parameters within which to work, as well as protect patients from unprofessional and unsafe nursing practice. The act is a dynamic document that evolves and is updated or amended as changes in scope of practice occur.”

- “The laws of the nursing profession can only function properly if nurses know the current laws governing practice in their state. Ignorance of the law is never an excuse!” (National Council of State Boards of Nursing, n.d.)
DNP-prepared nurses are perfectly positioned to be health policy leaders.
How Can Faculty in DNP Programs Encourage Students Engagement in Health Policy?

- Teach students in DNP programs that successful policy advocacy depends on having the power, will, time, energy, and the political skills needed to “play the game” in the legislative arena (Abood, 2007).

- Give students the option of choosing a health policy project for their DNP project.
Focus on a change that impacts healthcare outcomes either through direct or indirect care
- Have a systems or population focus
- Demonstrate implementation in the appropriate area of practice
- Include a plan for sustainability
- Include an evaluation of process and/or outcomes
- Provide a foundation for future practice scholarship
- Could be group/team projects when project aims are consistent with program focus (AACN, 2015)

AACN’s Statements Regarding DNP Projects

https://www.aacnnursing.org/
NONPF’s Statements Regarding DNP Projects

Scientific Foundation Competencies
Critically analyzes data and evidence for improving advanced nursing practice.
Integrates knowledge from the humanities and sciences within the context of nursing science.
Translates research and other forms of knowledge to improve practice processes and outcomes.
Develops new practice approaches based on the integration of research, theory, and practice knowledge.

Leadership Competencies
Assumes complex and advanced leadership roles to initiate and guide change.
Provides leadership to foster collaboration with multiple stakeholders (e.g. patients, community, integrated health care teams, and policy makers) to improve health care.
Demonstrates leadership that uses critical and reflective thinking.
Advocates for improved access, quality and cost effective health care.
Advances practice through the development and implementation of innovations incorporating principles of change.
Communicates practice knowledge effectively both orally and in writing.

https://www.nonpf.org/Login.aspx#
NONPF’s Statements Regarding DNP Projects

Quality Competencies
Uses best available evidence to continuously improve quality of clinical practice.
Evaluates the relationships among access, cost, quality, and safety and their influence on health care.
Evaluates how organizational structure, care processes, financing, marketing and policy decisions impact the quality of health care.
Anticipates variations in practice and is proactive in implementing interventions to ensure quality.

Practice Inquiry Competencies
Provides leadership in the translation of new knowledge into practice.
Generates knowledge from clinical practice to improve practice and patient outcomes.
Applies clinical investigative skills to improve health outcomes.
Leads practice inquiry, individually or in partnership with others.
Disseminates evidence from inquiry to diverse audiences using multiple modalities.
Analyzes clinical guidelines for individualized application into practice.

Policy Competencies
Demonstrates an understanding of the interdependence of policy and practice.

https://www.nonpf.org/Login.aspx#
NONPF’s Statements Regarding DNP Projects

Health Delivery System
Applies knowledge of organizational practices and complex systems to improve health care delivery. Effects health care change using broad based skills including negotiating, consensus-building, and partnering. Minimizes risk to patients and providers at the individual and systems level. Facilitates the development of health care systems that address the needs of culturally diverse populations, providers, and other stakeholders. Evaluates the impact of health care delivery on patients, providers, other stakeholders, and the environment. Analyzes organizational structure, functions and resources to improve the delivery of care.

(NONPF, 2013)

https://www.nonpf.org/Login.aspx#
What Could be the Focus of a DNP Health Policy Project?

- Analysis of Policy
- Creating New Policy
- Interpretation of Policy
Could be individual or team projects with potential interprofessional education collaboration.

Can promote interprofessional collaboration.

Sample topics could include: Shared Decision Making in Patients with Osteoarthritis of the Hip and Knee, Data “Dashboard” to Track the Future of Nursing, Registered Nursing Workforce Surveys and Analysis, Nurse Demand Survey and Study, Functional Outcomes After Major Surgery in Nursing Home Residents, Oncology Advocacy Project and Pediatric Screening for Behavioral Health Problems (Center for Health Law and Policy Innovation, n.d., The Philip R. Lee Institute for Health Policy Studies, n.d.)
Examples of Settings for DNP Practice and Potentially for Policy Projects

Organizational Systems Leadership
Population Health
Policy Projects
Long-Term Care Facilities
Urgent Care
Prison Systems
School Systems
Community-based Care Network
Rural Native American Reservation
Public Health Department
Non-governmental Organizations and Community Health Organizations Corporations
(AACN, 2015)
By shaping the way that DNP-prepared nurses practice as well as drive health policy, we are shaping the way that the nation’s patients receive care (Carpenter & Brown, 2015).
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