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Demonstrating Continued Competence for Registered Nurses

The issue of requiring continuing education as a condition of RN licensure has been brought to the attention of Wisconsin Nurses Association by legislators, nurses and other health care professionals. Support for mandatory continuing education has increased in the legislature as it is viewed as a means of assuring the public that practitioners are competent to practice. In Wisconsin, mandatory continuing education as a condition of licensure exists for the majority of health care professionals except for nursing. Wisconsin's Board of Nursing may use mandatory continuing education as part of a Discipline Order for those nurses found to have violated the Nurse Practice Act.

WNA conducted a review of the pros and cons to mandatory continuing education. The results are as follows:

Pros

- ?? Demonstrates professionalism
- ?? Demonstrates commitment to maintaining competence
- ?? Demonstrates attention to patient safety and a reduction in medical errors
- ?? Motivates employers to support continuing education needs of RN employees
- ?? Raises the standard for continuing education for all nurses
- ?? Research supports the conclusion that continuing education positively affects nursing practice.

Cons

- ?? Seat time doesn't guarantee learning
- ?? Difficult to agree on competency standards
- ?? Administrative and monitoring costs
- ?? Concerns about the cost, access, quality and relevance of Continuing Education offerings
- ?? Research inconclusive about the benefits of *mandatory* continuing education over *voluntary* continuing education
- ?? Difficult to measure outcomes of mandatory continuing education on patient care due to the many variables that influence patient outcomes. Influencing variables include, the individual nurse, the choice of the continuing education program, the continuing education program itself, learning styles, professionalism, and accountability.

Further review of this topic notes that continuing education should not be viewed as the only possible of means demonstrating nurse competence. Currently, there are a number of

discussions among several national groups related to measuring and demonstrating competence. Such groups include the American Nurses Credentialing Center, National Council of State Boards of Nursing, American Nurses Association Congress on Nursing Practice & Economics, Institute of Medicine and the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Health Care Organizations. What is emerging from all of these groups is the recognition that there are a variety of approaches to measuring and demonstrating competence and competencies.

1. WNA supports, including documentation of, activities demonstrating continued competence as part of licensure for registered nurses.
2. Support multiple approaches to demonstrating continued competence. Examples include:

- ~~///~~ Hours of practice per year requirement
- ~~///~~ Relevant college credit
- ~~///~~ Certification in a nursing specialty
- ~~///~~ Teaching in a nursing program
- ~~///~~ Nursing research
- ~~///~~ Publication in a peer-reviewed journal
- ~~///~~ Continuing education

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