Preparing nurses to advance health in the 21st Century

JUST AS THE BETTY IRENE MOORE SCHOOL OF NURSING admitted its inaugural classes of graduate students in fall 2010, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) released the Future of Nursing report, a blueprint for optimizing the contribution of nursing to the health of the nation.

According to the report, nurses’ roles, responsibilities, and education should change significantly to meet the increased demand for high-quality and high-value care, as well as to advance improvements in America’s increasingly complex health system. The report is the product of a two-year study convened by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Initiative on the Future of Nursing, at the IOM. The work is the result of a series of public forums to gather insights and evidence from an unprecedented range of health-care experts.

“The report highlights the importance of nursing in health care for our nation, and calls for important transformation in education and practice” said Heather M. Young, associate vice chancellor for nursing and founding dean of the Betty Irene Moore School of Nursing at UC Davis. “This could have been written as a blueprint for our school, because our program design and aspirations align strongly with the direction that the interdisciplinary panel of experts set for nursing for the future.”

Similar to the way input was gathered for the nationwide nursing report, School of Nursing leaders convened several meetings with local, regional and national health-care leaders as they designed the new school and asked them to describe the nurse of the future.

“Through that process, we identified key aspects of nursing practice for the future: more community-based, more technology-enabled, consumers at the center of care with professionals supporting their health goals,” Young said.

The Betty Irene Moore School of Nursing and UC Davis Health System are actively engaged in implementing the eight recommendations of the IOM report. Just one month following the October 2010 publication of the report, UC Davis Health System convened a lively discussion, with more than 150 engaged stakeholders attending in person and another 300 joining the conversation via web conference. The result of the conference was the development of the California Action Coalition, one of five groups at that time to pilot action in each of their states. Today, there are 36 statewide action coalitions leading the overall initiative.

Immediately, several members of the school’s faculty and research team took leadership roles in the California Action Coalition. Young serves on the
executive committee and presents to various groups nationwide about the coalition’s work. Other faculty and researchers lead a variety of efforts, specifically with input in the area of leadership and the promotion of nurse leadership.

In August 2011, the Betty Irene Moore School of Nursing hosted a special town-hall forum of the California Action Coalition with more than 120 health-care consumers, health-care professionals and partners to discuss the Future of Nursing report. Sponsored by the Future for Nursing Campaign for Action, AARP Center to Champion Nursing in America and the Betty Irene Moore School of Nursing, the event increased awareness of efforts to improve health in California and optimize the role of nurses.

“This event was led by scholars and students of the Betty Irene Moore School of Nursing and demonstrates the role that UC Davis plays in the development of health-care leaders,” Young said.

Casey Shillam, a Betty Irene Moore School of Nursing Postdoctoral Fellow who serves on the executive committee and as communications director for the California Action Coalition, led the coordination of most aspects of the forum and other associated activities. Doctoral and master’s-degree students then planned the town-hall program as an assignment for a leadership course.

Young said the school will continue its close partnership with the Future of Nursing Campaign for Action.

“The IOM report on the Future of Nursing stimulated a great deal of productive conversation in our school, and there are several areas we have identified as core to our education, service and research missions,” she said. “Our graduates need to deal with nursing practice as it is now, but more importantly, they need to be equipped with the requisite knowledge and skills to move nursing practice to the future, through innovation and system change.”

ANOTHER AREA OF GREAT EMPHASIS in the IOM report relates to nursing leadership and the role of nurses as full partners with physicians and other health-care providers in improving health care in the U.S. Young said UC Davis will contribute specifically in this area of leadership development as it is a core element of the School of Nursing. The education program features active learning, problem solving and partnering with agencies and other leaders in the community.

“Now, more than ever, is the time to focus that leadership and expertise in ways that positions nursing in leadership in this state, as well as developing leaders through our education,” Young said. “Our faculty, researchers and graduates are a resource in many ways through practice expertise, commitment to and understanding of how to promote population health, expertise in translating research into policy, and influence in policy arenas. These are the nurse leaders who will populate boards and advisory councils and commissions across all sectors that deal with health.”

Ultimately, the goals of both the Betty Irene Moore School of Nursing and the Future of Nursing Campaign for Action underscore the critical need to fully prepare future nurses for increasingly complex care and greater responsibility.

“We engage our students in meaningful ways to develop the health-care solutions our society requires,” Young said. “This report and the supporting action is a unique opportunity to call nursing students to leadership. We must support their growth and development toward the future we all prefer.”