

Advancing American Kidney Health – The Time for Nurses to Act Is Now

In recent President's messages, I have discussed the Advancing American Kidney Health (AAKH) initiative. As I end my term as President of ANNA on January 1, 2020, to become ANNA's Executive Director, I want to share lessons learned regarding this Executive Order and the goals set forth by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

It was July 10, 2019, when the Executive Order was signed. There was a wave of optimism across the kidney community because kidney health was receiving national attention. This optimism was soon followed by the onset of reality when the DHHS (2019) set forth three goals related to achieving kidney health: to reduce the number of individuals developing end stage kidney disease, to increase the number of patients receiving dialysis at home or transplanted with a kidney, and to increase the number of available kidneys for transplant.

Since mid-July, ANNA has been involved in discussions with our kidney, patient, medical, and nursing partners about what this initiative will mean, and the impact on patient care and practice. While the answers to these questions are fewer than the questions being asked, I have gained some insights over the last few months that I want to share.

- There is a shift from managing kidney disease to promoting kidney health.
- Successful implementation of innovative initiatives to address goals set forth by the DHHS will require collaboration across the kidney, patient, medical, and nursing communities.
- ANNA is receiving offers to collaborate, and the association is exploring and accepting the invitations.
- The kidney community has either a strong understanding or no understanding of the roles of nephrology nurses. There is no middle ground.
- The nursing community knows that nephrology nurses work in outpatient hemodialysis units but often does not realize that we practice in acute, community, in-center, home therapies, long-term care, and other settings.
- Nephrology nursing is experiencing workforce issues, but so is every other nursing specialty.
- The market for nephrology nurses is extremely competitive in some geographic locations, leading to job hopping.



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- Meeting the goals of the AAKH initiative is going to require that we think about new care delivery models in nephrology nursing settings.
- Nurses are the most trusted group by the public to improve the U.S. health care system.
- Nephrology nurses are natural leaders in promoting kidney health because health promotion is fundamental to our practice.

The Public Holds Greatest Trust in Nurses to Improve the Health Care System

While attending the American Society of Nephrology (ASN) Kidney Week in October, I heard two thoughts shared often: "AAKH is a once-in-a-generation opportunity," and "The time is now to improve kidney health." There is no better time for nurses to get involved in improving kidney health than right now when public trust is focused on us to improve the health care system. Recent findings from the study *Americans' Values and Beliefs about National Health Insurance Reform* found that when it comes to who the public trusts to reform the U.S. health care system, the greatest trust was in nurses (58%), followed by physicians (30%), hospitals (18%), and labor unions (14%), with several other groups like government and industry receiving 4% to 6% ratings (The Commonwealth Fund/The New York Times/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, 2019).

Nephrology Nursing Opportunities

We must stay focused on promoting kidney health and patient empowerment because it is what nurses do best. We must partner with patient groups to empower each

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ANNA improves members' lives through education, advocacy, networking, and science.

other. There is no greater advocacy partnership than a nurse and patient.

Addressing workforce issues will require investigating models of practice implemented by other specialties and developing new models. A movement to home therapies may require delegation of tasks to non-professional personnel, allowing nurses time to deliver nursing care and patient education. Registered nurses (RNs) and advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs) must be enabled to practice at the top of their knowledge, skills sets, and licenses. This may require creating new ancillary roles in nephrology settings. We must continue to inform the community, physicians, patients, our nursing colleagues, and legislative and regulatory bodies about the roles of nephrology nurses and all settings in which we practice, so they better understand our unique contribution to practice and patient outcomes.

We need to expose future generations of RNs and APRNs to nephrology nursing. One opportunity is the development of designated education units in acute, in-center, and home therapies settings that allow clinical rotations for undergraduate and graduate nursing students. Designated education units are units that deliver high-quality patient care and provide student learning opportunities through well-designed clinical experiences and clinical faculty, who are often experts in the area of practice, partnering academic and practice entities. Schools of nursing are looking for clinical placement sites, and nephrology nurse employers are searching to recruit new-to-practice nurses, so this model holds real potential. Other opportunities for student exposure to nephrology nursing practice may occur through the implementation of externship programs prior to graduation and nursing

residency programs for new graduate nurses. Externships and residencies are formal programs that provide education, support, and mentorship for nurses new to practice.

Nephrology nursing must explore best practices employed by other nursing specialties related to care models, patient education strategies, patient monitoring, strategic partnerships, and nursing education models for current and new-to-practice nephrology nurses. We must measure the outcomes and impact through evidence-based practice and research projects.

The Time to Act Is Now

Nephrology nurses have the talents to lead the kidney health movement. This will require taking some risks and recognizing there will be change. Public trust is on nurses to reform health care. This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity for nephrology nurses, and the time to act is now.

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