

How nursing schools can forward nurse-led innovation

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In order for nurses to lead in health and health care innovation, schools of nursing and nursing programs must think strategically about the knowledge and skills the next generation of nurses will need and then

support those innovation needs at all levels of research, education, and practice.

An article recently published in the *Journal of Professional Nursing*, authored by three nurse leaders at the University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing (Penn Nursing), shares how schools of nursing can integrate innovation in their missions. The article describes actionable steps to position nurses as leaders in this space and provide insight into how Penn Nursing has infused innovation into its mission and curriculum.

The case for integrating innovation into nursing education

Nurses are natural innovators skilled in introducing new approaches, ideas, and solutions to the problems faced in [health](#) and health care. Their understanding of patients, families, and communities provides a [unique perspective](#) to the sustainability, scale-up, and use of technology and other innovative processes to promote health and well-being, prevent disease, and manage acute and chronic conditions. Still, nurses are absent or often silent partners in health and health care innovation initiatives.

While many schools of nursing are integrating innovation into their curriculums and creating spaces for students and faculty to engage in the innovation process, innovation must be a central driver of the nursing education provided across the country.

"We must promote nurse-led innovation initiatives internally and externally, to amplify the work being done by nurses in education, research, policy, and practice," says the article's lead author Marion Leary, RN, MSN, MPH, FAHA, Director of Innovation at Penn Nursing. "If we do this, we will achieve a clear, coherent, and unified message around nurse-innovation and further solidify the innovation

ecosystem within the profession."

Driving innovation into nursing school missions

The key to integrating innovation into a [school](#) of nursing is to develop a shared meaning of innovation within the university and health care community. Innovation means different things to different disciplines.

"Developing a disciplinary-specific perspective of innovation is a first step to guiding curricular changes and enhancements," says article coauthor Antonia M. Villarruel, Ph.D., RN, FAAN, Professor and Margaret Bond Simon Dean of Nursing. "This perspective will communicate to interdisciplinary colleagues and the public nursing's role and focus in innovation, and can be used for forging partnerships to address specific issues and problems."

Once the definition of innovation is adapted, the authors outline strategic steps to build an infrastructure that supports innovation. Those steps include:

- Establish strategic goals to prioritize activities, align resources, communicate innovation, and serve as a progress benchmark.
- Build an innovation infrastructure to systematize and embed a culture of innovation within the school.
- Develop faculty and faculty champions of innovation.
- Integrate innovation into administrative functions.
- Build relationships across schools.
- Marketing innovation expertise externally.
- Transform research discoveries into practice.
- Position students to develop and lead innovations.
- Enhance innovation education through active learning.
- Position nurses to drive and inform innovations in health systems.

Penn Nursing: Innovation case study

The authors share how Penn Nursing took the recommended steps to successfully define and infuse innovation into their school's program. Their first step was aligning with the University of Pennsylvania's core values, one of which is innovation. Innovation strategic priorities were identified in 2015.

Infrastructure and cross-campus relationship-building soon followed, with many initiatives designed for engagement with other schools to build and support faculty and student innovation skills and projects. Initiatives were then created to inform the broader community about nursing innovation. Transforming research discoveries into practice remains an ongoing initiative, as does positioning students to develop and lead innovations in the current strategic plan 2020-2025.

The article further describes Penn Nursing's focus on active learning to enhance innovation education and how the school creates original content to spread innovation knowledge. It also explains how the School of Nursing leverages its practice partners to position nurses to drive and inform innovations in health care.

"The Future of Nursing 2020–2030 report highlights nurses as innovators and advocates for nurses to see themselves as such, while calling for leaders in health and health care to support nursing's innovative aptitude, says article coauthor Therese S. Richmond, Ph.D., RN, FAAN, Andrea B. Laporte Professor of Nursing and Associate Dean for Research & Innovation. "Therefore, as we move into the future, it will be essential that we create a foundation of [innovation](#) for the next generation of [nurse](#) leaders."

More information: Marion Leary et al, Creating an innovation infrastructure in academic nursing, *Journal of Professional Nursing*

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