LEADERSHIP ACADEMY PROJECT FOCUS

Establishing the Alabama Association of Clinical Nurse Specialists

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In Alabama, the clinical nurse specialist (CNS) faces many challenges related to practice authority and role clarity. Although title protected, the CNS has no true advanced-practice privileges in the state with no option to gain prescriptive authority independently or with a collaborating physician. At the start of my Leadership Academy project, there was no state-wide CNS organization in Alabama, making the CNS the only recognized advanced-practice nurse without a representing professional organization. To make matters worse, only one CNS educational program remains in the state, with programs closing at an alarming rate nationwide. These closings, limited practice, and lack of a professional organization in Alabama has led to underutilization and lack of recognition of the CNS role. Please refer to the featured article in this edition for further information on the CNS role in Alabama.

To address the need for a professional voice in Alabama, I collaborated with the CNS program coordinator at the University of South Alabama, Dr. Chondra Butler, to gain assistance and insight on forming a state-wide organization for the CNS. To assess interest in forming the organization, interest letters were sent to all licensed CNSs in the state with responses collected via an organizational email address. With overwhelming support, an initial virtual meeting was held with 23 CNS participants from around the state.

Ideas were exchanged in this initial meeting where the Bylaw and Finance committees were formed with chairs appointed. At the next virtual meeting, the Bylaws were approved with the proposed organizational dues. Also in this meeting, officers of the organization were elected with a detailed discussion on the mission of the organization. On August 31, 2017, the Alabama Association of Clinical Nurse Specialists (AACNS) was created! AACNS aims to serve as a local and national networking hub for the CNS while promoting, clarifying, and establishing a professional voice for the role. All current, retired, or student CNSs are invited to join. National certification is not required for membership. For a membership application, email aacns2017@gmail.com. You can also like us on Facebook @AlabamaAssociationofCNSs.

To date, AACNS has held two virtual meetings since creation with plans to have a face-to-face meeting in Montgomery in the Fall. There are currently 15 paid members around the state with a state-wide membership drive in action now. The creation of AACNS has been presented nationally at the annual National Association of Clinical Nurse Specialists Conference with an affiliation agreement with the national organization pending. Members of the AACNS Board of Directors were appointed to the Alabama Board of Nursing’s CNS Taskforce to help communicate the role around the state and to impact legislation that will improve practice authority for the CNS in Alabama. With future increased membership, AACNS will take the lead in promoting the role of the CNS in Alabama and nationwide.