

Background Information

The Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) in Florida

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- Florida's state universities currently offer a master's degree in nursing, usually with one or more advanced practice specialty tracks (e.g., family nurse practitioner, pediatric nurse practitioner, nurse midwife). Credits required for a master's degree in these tracks generally range from 45-55 credits. Thus, the credits required for a nursing master's degree, with didactic and clinical education hours, are far beyond the requirements for a master's degree in most other fields (generally, 30-35 credits). Despite this, faculty and graduates of advanced practice master's degree programs have identified additional content and experiences needed in these curricula in order for advanced practice nurses to provide safe and effective care given the increasing complexity of health care.
- The *American Association of Colleges of Nursing Position Statement on the Practice Doctorate in Nursing* (October, 2004) identified the need for a transition from master's degree education to doctoral education for advanced practice nursing. The rationale for this transition is the growing complexity of the health care system, the burgeoning growth in scientific knowledge, and increasing sophistication of technology.
- In addition, a recent National Academy of Sciences (NAS) report (<http://www.nap.edu/books/0309094275/html>) supported the development of a "non-research clinical doctorate in nursing" to prepare expert practitioners who can also serve as clinical faculty. The American Association of Colleges of Nursing has summarized the key points of the 170-page report at the following link, <http://www.aacn.nche.edu/Media/NewsReleases/2005/NASReport.htm>.
- The national trend in graduate nursing education is to transition from the specialized master's degree to the Doctor of Nursing Practice. Over 60 top ranked nursing colleges and schools are already making the move, including
 - . Case Western Reserve University
 - . Columbia University
 - . Rush University
 - . University of Pittsburgh
 - . University of Alabama - Birmingham
 - . University of Illinois – Chicago
 - . University of Iowa
 - . Emory University
 - . University of Colorado Health Science Center
 - . University of South Carolina
 - . University of Tennessee Health Science Center

Recently, the state higher education board in Georgia approved the DNP, and the Medical College of Georgia School of Nursing has admitted its first DNP class.

Frequently Asked Questions:

- Will the new DNP mean the end to nursing master's degree programs in Florida?
Over the next several years, it is expected that nursing schools in Florida will begin to phase out those master's degree tracks that prepare nurses for advanced practice (e.g., nurse practitioner). This is in keeping with national recommendations (American Association of Colleges of Nursing and the accrediting body, Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education) that as of 2015, advanced practice nurses should be prepared with a DNP, not a master's degree. The national bodies that offer the certification exams for advanced practice are expected to require nurses to hold a DNP prior to examination as of 2015, and perhaps earlier for some specialties. Selected schools in Florida may initially offer the DNP as a completion program for those who already hold a master's degree in nursing. However, over time it will be more efficient for many schools to phase out the advanced practice master's degree tracks. The DNP is designed to be a post-baccalaureate degree and there is considerable interest among baccalaureate degree graduates in pursuing this degree directly.

Other master's degree tracks in nursing, such as the Clinical Nurse Leader and those tracks that prepare nurse educators for community colleges are likely to continue in Florida.

- How will the move to the DNP affect the nursing shortage in Florida?
The current and projected shortage of nurses in Florida and the nation is at two levels: new nurses (RNs who earn a bachelor's degree in Florida's universities and four-year colleges), and nursing faculty members, most particularly those prepared with a *terminal* degree.

The DNP is a new terminal degree in nursing and as such is expected to attract a new pool of nurses to doctoral study and faculty roles. Nurses who desire to emphasize clinical expertise (verses research) will now have a pathway to a terminal degree. It is expected that many DNP graduates will assume faculty roles in Florida's colleges and universities, thus helping to ease the faculty shortage and contributing to the education of more new RNs.

Master's degree programs in Florida that focus on preparing nurse educators for community colleges are expected to continue.

- How will DNP graduates be prepared to assume the nurse educator role?
As in other disciplines, the doctorate is the appropriate degree for a permanent faculty role in Florida's four-year colleges and universities. The DNP program is

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not designed to prepare educators, per se, any more than are PhD programs. Graduates from all doctoral programs (PhD or DNP) who wish to be educators will be offered additional preparation (such as education courses and graduate teaching assistantships) to add pedagogical skill to their base of clinical expertise.

- Will the DNP degree add cost by requiring hospitals and health care agencies to pay more for advanced practice nurses?

This is a marketplace issue, not an educational one. It is anticipated that DNP graduates employed in practice settings will contribute significantly to better patient outcomes and concomitantly to reduced costs (e.g., fewer complications, fewer readmissions, reduced medication errors). Over time DNP graduates may command higher salaries based on the contributions they make to the health care system.

- Does implementation of the DNP mean advanced practice nurses will no longer be permitted to practice without a doctorate?

Nurses with master's degrees will continue to practice in their current capacities. It is anticipated that most states will "grandfather" in those nurses holding advanced practice certification prior to 2015. A similar process occurred when the field of pharmacy moved from requiring a bachelor's degree to a professional doctorate for licensure.

- Is it the intent of the DNP to further expand the legal scope of practice for APNs?

No. Transitioning to the DNP will not alter the current scope of practice for advanced practice nurses. The Florida Nurse Practice Act describes the scope of practice allowed for advanced practice nurses. These would likely remain unchanged. The transition to the DNP will better prepare advanced practice nurses for their current roles given the growing complexity of health care.

- Will having nurses hold the title "doctor" confuse patients or the public?

This is not the intent of the DNP, nor is this likely to occur. Many advanced practice nurses in Florida currently hold doctoral degrees and are addressed as "doctor," which is similar to how other expert practitioners in clinical areas are addressed, including clinical psychologists, dentists, optometrists, and podiatrists. DNPs will be expected to clearly display and explain their credentials to insure that patients understand their preparation as a provider, just as current advanced practice nurses do.

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- Hasn't the move to the professional doctorate in fields like pharmacy and physical therapy resulted in a decrease in student enrollment in these programs?
No. This is not true in Florida or nationally. There were short-term enrollment decreases in some programs for one to two years while they transitioned to the professional doctorate. However, the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy confirms the highest level ever of enrollments in pharmacy, and this is true also in Florida programs. Likewise, there has been high student demand and increased enrollment in Florida programs offering the Doctor of Physical Therapy and the Doctor of Occupational Therapy.