

LPNs are Vital to Health Care Delivery

At the end of WWII the government saw the need for more nurses, as our soldiers returned and our population boomed. Because our country and its people needed good nurses fast, the Licensed Practical Nurse program was instigated.

Today we are in a similar situation. With the new health care legislation, 32 million more people will enter our health care system by 2014, at the same time 79 million Baby Boomers will need more care as well. We are in a perfect storm for a nursing shortage. We need good nurses fast, and LPNs are good nurses.

Their training lacks the core courses that degrees provide, but the anatomy, physiology, chemistry and other nursing courses are the caliber and often the same as the Associate Degree RN programs. While having knowledge of literature and Western Civilization makes for a well-rounded person, it does not make a better bedside nurse. Often LPN students have as much or greater clinical opportunities than RN students.

Recently I spoke to someone who had a degree in biology and was in the two-year fast track BSN program. When she described her courses, she explained that the first year was “core courses” and the second an intense program of nursing. Hmmm, I thought. That sounds like an LPN program to me!

For the past several decades there have been efforts of and on to eliminate LPN positions in hospital settings. Thirty years ago, I recall the movement to release LPNs and have only RNs doing “total patient care.” When this was proven to be too costly (who couldn’t see that coming!?) nursing assistants were hired to help the RNs. Their training and education was inconsistent at best. It baffled me then as I questioned why LPNs were not employed to do assessments, pass meds, etc. to work with RNs to deliver superb care.

As a professional speaker I am fortunate to travel this nation talking to thousands of nurses, HR directors and CNOs. All agree that in a few years, when hiring restrictions are

lifted and patient censuses increase, we are going to experience a nursing shortage greater than we have seen to date. To provide care for the patients, we need to allow everyone in our profession work to their highest potential.

In an ideal world, I agree that every nurse should have a degree. But while that is ideal, it is idealistic. Nurses are having to do more with less. The patient loads are so demanding that in some cases patient care suffers. We cannot ever forget the bottom line in all we do...to give compassionate comprehensive patient care to all those who need it. We need more good nurses to do that. LPNs are good nurses.

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LeAnn Thieman LPN, CSP, CPAE is in the Speaker Hall of Fame and coauthor of *Chicken Soup for the Nurse's Soul* and *Chicken Soup for the Nurse's Soul, Second Dose*. She is an expert in nurse recruitment and retention. To learn more about her books or presentations, visit www.NurseRecruitmentandRetention.com or call **1-970-223-1574**.

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