Increasing the Number of Oncology Nurses Serving on Boards

AnnMarie Lee Walton, PhD, RN, MPH, OCN®, CHES, and Connie Mullinix, PhD, MBA, MPH, RN

Nurses have knowledge about quality, safety, and the patient experience that is valuable to governing boards. In 2011, the Health and Medicine Division of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine recommended that nurses be prepared and enabled to lead change to advance health care. Five years after the recommendation, work toward this goal is still needed.

At a Glance
- Nurses have communication, negotiation, and assessment skills needed by governing boards.
- The Nurses on Boards Coalition and state Action Coalitions are working to get 10,000 nurses on boards by 2020.
- Oncology nurses can and should serve on professional association boards, nonprofit boards, for-profit boards, and local and national commissions to improve health.

Representation of Nurses on Governing Boards

The inclusion of nurses on governing boards is one solution for hospitals that want to remain financially healthy while providing high-quality, value-based care. Not only do nurses have knowledge about quality, safety, and the patient experience, but they also possess communication, negotiation, and assessment skills needed by boards. After extensive study, the Health and Medicine Division of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (HMD, 2011) provided its eighth recommendation, to “prepare and enable nurses to lead change to advance health care” (p. 14). The recommendation also stated that “public, private, and governmental health care decision makers at every level should include representation from nursing on boards, on executive management teams, and in other key leadership positions (HMD, 2011, p. 14). The five-year evaluation of the Future of Nursing initiative by an independently appointed evaluation team concluded that more needed to be done to get nurses into decision-making positions and that the public should be educated on the role nurses play and should be playing in high-quality, safe patient care (HMD, 2015).

A 2015 survey on the composition of hospital boards found that only 5% of boards included nurse members, a decrease from the 2011 baseline year in which 6% of boards surveyed had nurse members (American Hospital Association’s Center for Healthcare Governance, 2014). The Campaign for