Increasing the Number of Oncology Nurses Serving on Boards

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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, non-profit boards, for-profit boards, and local and national commissions to improve health.

Priorities at the hospital board level have shifted toward a focus on quality, value-based care, and patient-centeredness, creating challenges for healthcare executives trained to cultivate revenue in a fee-for-service environment. For example, on October 1, 2012, Medicare began linking payment to quality rather than reimbursing for procedures and hospital stays. Readmissions within 30 days of discharge and care for hospital-acquired infections no longer are reimbursed (Medicare.gov, n.d.). This process for reimbursement is new to the governing bodies of hospitals, and many have not adjusted to the change. The development of policies and strategic directions frequently are set by governance groups who have a majority of members with financial expertise rather than those who understand quality, safety, and the patient experience. The days of focus on mergers, acquisitions, and increasing patient visits and procedures to increase financial viability have passed. A focus on quality and patient care must be the governing body's top priority. In this new environment, a hospital board of directors must include patient care experts to responsibly allocate resources and plan for the strategic direction and financial viability of the organization.

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...