

Lack of Minority Role Models Affects Nursing Shortage

By Jody Vilschick

Closing the Gap, First Summit Packs the House • January/February 2003

There are too few minority role models in the health care professions, according to Dr. Betty Smith Williams, president of the National Coalition of Minority Nurses and immediate past president of the National Black Nurses Association (NBNA).

The National Sample Survey of Registered Nurses, conducted in 2000 by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, indicated that 86.6 percent of registered nurses are White, and just 12.3 percent are non-White. African American nurses make up the largest subgroup of minority nurses.

This lack of diversity is a special concern to nurse educators concerned about the next generation of nurses. "Ethnic minority role models are essential to influencing minorities to pursue a career in nursing," Williams said. "If they aren't there, they cannot influence young minorities." The lack of nurse role models also discourages minority students from seeing themselves as successful nurses, Williams said.

This issue is acute because of the looming shortage of nurses in general. "We must tap minorities to fill the need for nurses," Williams said. "To do that, minority role models must be visible. We are not yet visible."

According to Williams, other barriers to minorities seeking nursing education include:

- ❖ Inadequate preparation for the health-care professions in high school;
- ❖ A lack of information about nursing as a profession;
- ❖ The cost of pursuing an education in nursing;
- ❖ Entrance requirements;
- ❖ Perceived (as well as real) discrimination;
- ❖ Isolation in schools whose students are mostly White;



*Map courtesy of National Sample Survey of Registered Nurses, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Service Administration, Bureau of Health Professions Division of Nursing.

- ❖ Unsupportive students and faculty;
- ❖ Family responsibilities (many students who are minorities must also support families); and
- ❖ Financial aid that is linked to full-time status.

"Some of the strategies to overcoming the lack of minority nurses include developing an approach that addresses the students' need to support their families, target outreach to minority communities, develop programs that are geographically accessible as well as affordable for minority students, and to enhance institutional supports, such as minority student groups," said Williams.

Williams believes that ethnic minority nursing associations, such as NBNA, are well positioned to pursue these strategies, and to engage in political advocacy. NBNA's mission includes lobbying for increased funding to establish a qualified cadre of nurse researchers who can address the health care issues that disproportionately affect African Americans, like cardiovascular disease, cancer, dia-

betes, HIV/AIDS, mental health, pain management, and a variety of women's health issues.

Programs Aimed at Increasing the Roles

"National associations, serving ethnic or racial minority nurses, have a variety of programs in place to encourage members of various minority communities to enter the nursing profession," said Williams.

The National Association of Hispanic Nurses (NAHN) has two such programs. One is a scholarship program that helps outstanding nursing students of Hispanic ancestry. The other is the "adoption" of immigrants from Latin American countries who are licensed nurses in their original countries. The Miami chapter of NAHN helps these immigrant nurses to become eligible for the Board of Nursing Licensure Exam. In addition, it is working with Miami Dade Community College School of Nursing in developing an educational program for these nurses.

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In 1998, a group of ethnic nurse organizations, including the NBNA and NAHN, came together to form the National Coalition of Ethnic Minority Nurse Associations. The mission of the coalition is to improve the provision of health care to ethnic populations in the nation. Other founding organization members are the Asian American and Pacific Islander Nurses Association (AAPINA) and the National Alaska Native American Indian Nurses Association (NANAINA).

For more information on the National Black Nurses Association, go to <http://www.nbna.org> ❖

Minority Registered Nurses Compared to the General Minority Population, March 2000

U.S. Population	Race/Ethnicity	RN Population
69.1%	White	86.6%
.7%	American Indian/Alaska Native	.5%
3.7%	Asian Pacific Islander	3.7%
12.5%	Hispanic	2.0%
12.1%	Black	4.9%
1.8%	More than 2 races	1.2%

Statistics courtesy of National Sample Survey of Registered Nurses, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Service Administration, Bureau of Health Professions, Division of Nursing.



Lack of Minority Role Models Affects Nursing Shortage is based on the Summit workshop Recruiting and Retaining Health Professionals, Thursday, July 11, 2002.

