

**MINUTES OF THE VIDEO CONFERENCE MEETING**  
**NEBRASKA CENTER FOR NURSING**  
**October 20, 2021**

**Call to Order**

The meeting of the Nebraska Center for Nursing (CFN) Board was called to order by Lisa Walters, Chair, on October 20, 2021, at 1:33 p.m. The central meeting location was at the Nebraska State Office Building, Room 3C, Lincoln NE 68508. Members participated via teleconference. Copies of the agenda were distributed in advance to the Board members on October 12, 2021, posted outside the Licensure Unit within the Nebraska State Office Building on October 12, 2021, and posted on the Department of Health and Human Services website on October 12, 2021. Copies of the revised agenda were distributed in advance to the Board members on October 18, 2021, posted outside the Licensure Unit within the Nebraska State Office Building on October 18, 2021, and posted on the Department of Health and Human Services website on October 18, 2021. Walters announced that a current copy of the Open Meetings Act was available at the central meeting location as well as online using the link listed on the agenda.

**Roll Call**

The following Board members answered roll call via teleconference:

- Lina Bostwick
- Suzanne Deyke
- Ronda Ehly
- Kathy Harrison
- Joan Nelson
- Lisa Walters

The following Board member joined the meeting after roll call: Charity Ebert (joined meeting at 1:36 p.m.).

A quorum was not present.

The following Board members were absent: Tamara Allen, Sheila Bjerrum, Kathy Bowman, Beth Burbach, Christi Glesmann, and Laura Weber.

Three Board positions were vacant.

The following staff member was present: Sherri Joyner, *Health Licensing Coordinator*.

The following staff members attended via videoconference:

- Ann Oertwich, *Program Manager*
- Kathy Hoebelheinrich, *Nursing Practice Consultant*
- Jacci Reznicek, *Nursing Education Consultant*
- Juan Ramirez, PhD, *Independent Consultant*

**Adoption of the Agenda**

No motion was made due to lack of quorum. Joyner noted that the meeting was for informational purposes only.

**Approval of the Minutes**

No motion was made due to lack of quorum. Joyner said that approval of the September 17, 2021, minutes would be placed on the agenda of the Center's December 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting.

These minutes have not been approved by the  
Nebraska Center for Nursing.

## **Center for Nursing Foundation Report**

Bostwick reported that the Foundation needs to receive 25 additional applications for the Center's specialty license plates in order for the plates to go into production.

Bostwick, Ramirez, and Theresa Delahoyde will meet on the following week to organize data for another article on the needs of rural nurses. They are also keeping an eye out for conferences and other opportunities where they might present their findings.

Bostwick also reported that the Foundation has updated their bylaws to require that a financial compilation be conducted by an independent auditor every 3-5 years.

Oertwich said that she is working on getting new members appointed to fill vacancies on the Center for Nursing Board, and that she hopes that one or more of the new members will be able to serve on the Foundation Board. Bostwick noted that Amberly Wagner-Connolly was interested in serving on the Foundation Board and asked if she could serve as a representative from NONL (the Nebraska Organization of Nurse Leaders). Ehly, who is a member of NONL, asked Bostwick for Wagner-Connolly's contact information so that she could begin the process on getting the item on the NONL's agenda.

## **Initiatives to Address Nursing Shortage**

HRSA Grant – Walters reported that the grant for funding for resiliency training for nurses has been submitted to HRSA (the Health Resources and Services Administration). The Center for Nursing has applied for the grant in partnership with the UNMC College of Nursing and the UNMC School of Public Health. They expect to learn whether the grant application has been approved in December 2021 or January 2022.

NHA Workgroup on Healthcare Worker Shortage & LR 212 – Oertwich reported that the Nebraska Hospital Association (NHA) is drafting recommendations for addressing the nursing shortage based on the information gathered by the workgroup. The plan is to forward the recommendations to Senator McDonnell, who introduced LR 212 in the Legislature. Walters noted that some of the recommendations NHA is expected to make, such as funding for childcare for hospital staff, sound promising.

Walters testified on October 6<sup>th</sup> at a hearing before the Legislature. The hearing was part of the LR 212 study examining the health care worker shortage in Nebraska and ways to increase the workforce. Other people who testified at the hearing included Juliann Sebastian, Dean of the UNMC College of Nursing, Andy Hale from the Nebraska Hospital Association, and Kari Wade, President of the Nebraska Nurses Association. Walters noted that the Governor is expected to make decisions early next year on distributions of CARES Act and Rescue Act funding.

## **HWTAC COVID-19 Webinar**

Members viewed the Health Workforce Technical Assistance Center's webinar on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the nursing workforce. The presenters were Peter Buerhaus, PhD, and David Auerbach, PhD. Topics and data presented during the webinar included the following:

### Employment Trends for RNs, LPNs, and Nurse Aides:

- From February 2020 to September 2021, the employment levels at skilled nursing facilities has dropped 15.1%, with a steady rate of decrease during this time period.
- Most other sectors that employ nurses saw a precipitous drop in nursing employment immediately after the pandemic started. Since that time, employment levels have rebounded, but they are still below February 2020 levels.
- Outpatient care centers are the only sector with a higher level of nursing employment now than in February 2020.

### Unemployment Trends for RNs, LPNs, and Nurse Aides:

- Unemployment rose for all three groups in the second and third quarter of 2020.
- Overall, unemployment rates for RNs and LPNs have now returned to pre-COVID levels. The unemployment rate for Nurse Aides is still higher than it was prior to the pandemic.
- Non-white RNs and Nurse Aides still have higher unemployment levels than they did before the outset of the pandemic. For non-white LPNs, the unemployment rates are now about the same as pre-pandemic levels.
- Unemployment rates in hospitals have returned to pre-COVID levels. In non-hospital settings, however, unemployment rates are still higher than they were prior to the pandemic.

### Future Workforce Implications

Based on data collected through the end of 2019, Buerhaus and Auerbach had forecasted that the RN workforce would grow 25% between 2020 and 2030. This forecast was shaped by the growing presence of the Millennial generation in the nursing workforce. Millennials have a higher likelihood of becoming RNs than any previous generation. The effect of COVID-19 on this forecast depends on two major questions: 1) whether the pandemic will lead to an increase or decrease in enrollment in nursing schools, and 2) whether nurses will leave the profession due to the pandemic. There is not enough data at this time to answer these questions. The American Association of Colleges of Nursing, however, has reported that there was a slower growth of BSN applicants in 2020 than in previous years.

### A Look Back at the 1990s

Buerhaus reported that during the 1990s, RN employment slowed as hospitals were under pressure to decrease costs in order to win contracts with HMOs. There were also assertions in the media about poor quality of health care and safety issues. As a consequence of this negative messaging, Buerhaus said that enrollment in nursing schools decreased between 1995 and 2000. In 1995, there were 97,052 RN graduates. In 1999, this number had fallen to 67,180. This was followed by a large, national shortage of hospital RNs in 1999 through 2001. Buerhaus expressed concerns that negative messaging around nursing due to COVID-19 runs the risk of recreating what happened in the 1990s.

2:45 p.m.      *Harrison left the meeting.*

### **Nursing Focus Groups**

Members discussed that Center's plan to conduct focus groups throughout Nebraska in order to get feedback from front-line nurses on what they need to support their practice. Walters said that it will be important to set ground rules in order to promote productive discussion and prevent the meetings from merely being a place for nurses to air their complaints. Nurses will need assurances that their comments will remain anonymous so that can speak honestly and openly. Walters also advised keeping NONL informed about the meetings so that nursing supervisors and leaders would have clear understanding of the Center's intentions.

Oertwich said that the current plan is to conduct 6-8 meetings with front-line nurses using Zoom during the fall and winter, and then conduct face-to-face meetings when the weather is nicer. Walters noted that nurses might be reluctant to attend an in-person meeting at this time because of their demanding work schedules. Walters said she was thinking of conducting the first Zoom meeting in November. Deyke recommended holding these meetings at various times of the day to accommodate nurses who work different shifts. She also noted that involvement by NONL and other nursing champions in the area could play a vital role in promoting attendance at the focus groups.

Potential questions to ask during the focus groups include the following: What are the greatest stressors in your current work environment? How do these stressors affect your personal life? Other than staffing, what would you like to see change in your current work environment? How does your employer show appreciation? What keeps you up at night? If your organization uses travel nurses, how has this impacted your work environment? How do you find joy at work? If you could tell your employer one thing, what would it be? Bostwick suggested asking registrants for the Zoom meetings to complete a pre-meeting survey in which they use the AONL components of a healthy workplace to rank their current employment site on a scale from 1 to 5.

Walters showed a flyer she had drafted to advertise the focus groups and asked for feedback. Nelson and Deyke recommended tweaking the language so that it was more positive and included empowering statements. Hoebelheinrich suggested adding a brief description of the Center for Nursing.

Members discussed the need to find a platform that would allow nurses to register for the Zoom-based focus groups. Deyke suggested using Eventbrite

### **Social Media Reports**

Ramirez reported that the page on the Center's website that gets the most views (after the home page) is the page for COVID-19 resources. The Education page is the second most-popular page and is getting an increasing number of views. There has also been an increase in the number of visitors who have been directed to the website from Facebook. In September 2021, 8% of the website's visitors came from Facebook, whereas previously the average was 4%.

### **Nursing Licensure**

Oertwich reported that staff plan to issue provisional licenses to new RN and LPN graduates through the end of December. This will allow new graduates to enter the workforce prior to taking NCLEX.

### **2022 Meeting Schedule**

Joyner said that she would email a list of potential 2022 meeting dates to members. The Board's next meeting is scheduled for December 3<sup>rd</sup> and will be conducted via Zoom. The Board can continue to meet virtually as long as the Executive Order regarding the health care worker shortage emergency is in effect. Once the Executive Order expires, no more than half of the Board's meeting can be held virtually.

### **Environmental Scan**

Deyke reported that she is researching education models for geriatric care. She has found that people across the country are reporting that their inpatient areas are full. COVID-19 numbers in some areas are also increasing. Deyke notes that the numbers seem to conflict with the messaging that the pandemic is getting better. Deyke said she was concerned about the effect of vaccine mandates on the workforce not just in healthcare but also on police and firefighters.

Deyke also asked Ehly about Mary Lanning Healthcare's templates for maternal health. Ehly noted that when Mary Lanning underwent re-accreditation, JCAHO identified their maternal health templates as a best practice and included them in a national presentation.

Ehly reported that Hastings is averaging 7-8 COVID patients a day, with one patient a day on a ventilator. About 1/3 of COVID patients are vaccinated. The length of stay for COVID patients is shorter than last year. They have seen more pediatric COVID admissions.

4:00 p.m. *Hoebelheinrich left the meeting.*

Oertwich asked Ehly if her facility is using travelling nurses. Ehly said there was approximately five travelers in the ER and four travelers in Med-Surg. She noted that their vacancy rate in the ER and ICU is 42-43%. Deyke noted that travelers often get three times the pay of regular staff, and that agencies that recruit travel nurses are pulling nurses, especially Millennial nurses, out of regular staff positions. Ehly said that it was very disheartening for nurses to see others in identical roles making so much more money.

4:03 p.m. *Ehly left the meeting.*

Nelson asked if data was available yet on the number of nurses who lost employment for not complying with vaccine mandates. Neither Walters nor Oertwich were aware of data being published yet.

Walters reported that a webinar will be conducted on October 27<sup>th</sup> on navigating toxic workplace cultures in nursing. Oertwich said she would track down information about the webinar and forward it to Glesmann so that it could be posted to the Center's Facebook page.

### **Conclusion**

The meeting concluded at 4:10 p.m.  
Respectfully submitted,



Sherri Joyner  
Health Licensing Coordinator