

State Board of Nursing Observes 100-Year Anniversary

The law that created the State Board of Examiners for Registration of Nurses was signed by Governor Edwin Stuart on May 1, 1909.

In Governor Rendell's recognition of the 100-year anniversary he stated, "As Governor and on behalf of all Pennsylvanians, I congratulate the Pennsylvania State Board of Nursing on their 100th anniversary and join with them celebrating this milestone. I am confident the board will remain a strong advocate for quality and excellence in health care for centuries to come."

Secretary of the Commonwealth Pedro A. Cortés said, "The State Board of Nursing's dedication to protecting the health, safety and welfare of the residents of Pennsylvania has helped position our state as a leader in high-quality health care. For 100 years, the board has worked tirelessly to craft the highest standards of education and conduct for the benefit of the professionals it regulates and the families they serve."

Basil L. Merenda, Commissioner of the Bureau of Professional and Occupational Affairs, noted, "Under the guidance of the board, the nursing profession has evolved to provide new avenues of service and encourage higher levels of responsibility for its practitioners."

Pennsylvania's New Approach to Addiction-Impaired Nurses

By Kathie Simpson, RN, Executive Director of Operations of the Pennsylvania Nurse Peer Assistance Program (PNAP), and

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Alcohol or drug addicted nurses were once considered by many to be pariahs, banished from the profession, receiving little help and less sympathy. Slowly over the past 25 years, attitudes have changed and the focus is now on treatment and rehabilitation. Even as more nurses recognize that substance abuse is a disease,

treatment and recovery options vary from state to state. In an effort to provide additional support for impaired nurses, the Pennsylvania Nurse Peer Assistance Program (PNAP) was created.

The Pennsylvania State Board of Nursing is responsible for establishing rules and regulations for the licensure and practice of professional and practical nursing in the commonwealth of Pennsylvania. According to the Professional Nursing Law, the Nurse Board has the authority to refuse, suspend or revoke a nurse's license if:

"The licensee is unable to practice professional nursing with reasonable skill and safety to patients by reason of mental or physical illness or condition or physiological or psychological dependence upon alcohol, hallucinogenic or narcotic drugs or other drugs which tend to impair judgment or coordination, as long as such dependence shall continue."

Under the "Impaired Professionals Program" section of The Professional Nursing Law and the "Impaired Practical Nurses Program" section of the Practical Nurse Law, the Nurse Board has the authority to defer disciplinary action against an impaired nurse's license so long as he or she agrees to enroll in an approved treatment program, signs an agreement with the board, and makes satisfactory progress.

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Since 1989, the Nurse Board through the state's Professional Health Monitoring Programs' (PHMP) Voluntary Recovery Program (VRP) has provided an alternative to discipline option for nurses suffering from a physical or mental impairment, such as chemical dependency.

The Department of State and the Nurse Board have been committed to providing additional services and support to impaired nurses. As part of this effort, the Department of State and the Nurse Board sought the services of a qualified agency to administer peer assistance services to impaired nurses.

Effective April 3, 2009, the Department of State has a contract with the Pennsylvania Nurse Peer Assistance Program (PNAP), a nonprofit organization, to provide peer assistance services to Commonwealth-licensed nurses. This new contract establishes the parameters by which PNAP and PHMP will coordinate their activities to assist impaired nurses referred to the VRP and the PHMP's Disciplinary Monitoring Unit (DMU).

The availability of the Nurse Peer Assistance Program now provides nurses with an advocacy program similar to peer assistance programs currently available to Commonwealth-licensed pharmacists and physicians. PNAP will promote early identification of impaired nurses through establishing a method to allow nurses to refer themselves to the program, in a manner that is safe, supportive and confidential. Furthermore, PNAP will offer monitoring services to individuals who are ineligible for PHMP participation, including nursing students and nurses with suspended licenses. PNAP will assist any practical nurse, registered nurse, clinical nurse specialist, certified registered nurse practitioner, certified nurse anesthetist, or certified nurse midwife to document his or her sobriety and rehabilitative efforts in their desire to have their license to practice nursing reinstated.

With the development of a Nurse Peer Assistance Program, PNAP offers the following services:

1. Intervention for individuals and/or facilities addressing and referring impaired nurses;
2. Assessment and referral options for impaired nurses to appropriate treatment programs;
3. Monitoring of the nurse's compliance with

the terms and conditions of his/her monitoring agreement, including treatment, support group attendance, abstinence, random drug testing, workplace monitoring, and contact with PNAP peer assistance monitor;

4. Regional offices throughout Pennsylvania in order to allow for face-to-face contact between the nurse and his/her PNAP Case Manager;
5. Representation at Nurse Board Hearings, if applicable, to provide documentation and/or testimony in disciplinary hearings and reinstatement hearings;
6. Professional outreach to provide education and training to employers, nursing organizations and associations, nursing schools, etc.;
7. Collaboration with schools of nursing that desire to develop an addictive disease curriculum;
8. Coordination of return to licensed practice so that nurses participating in PNAP are capable of being gainfully employed in their chosen profession as competent, safe practitioners; and
9. Referral of nurses to attorneys when a nurse is at risk of having formal disciplinary action initiated against his/her nursing license and/or has criminal charges filed against them.

For more information regarding the Pennsylvania Nurse Peer Assistance Program, please call toll-free 877-298-7627, or visit www.pnap.org.

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