## EppiccNURSE: Education Program Portal & Information Communication Channel

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In 2007, the Pennsylvania State Board of Nursing (Board) deployed a web-based information technology (IT) system referred to as an education program portal and information communication channel. Named *eppiccNURSE,* the intent of this system was to create greater efficiencies in information exchange between the Board and all pre-licensure nursing education programs across the Commonwealth. This IT system fully replaced the traditional paper-based system for the submission of documents by pre-licensure nursing education programs as required by Board regulation. It has enhanced efficiency and the services provided to the nursing education programs through faster approval times for nursing faculty. There are currently close to 5,000 licensed registered nurses working as faculty in this Commonwealth. In addition, the system contains a master agency list of available clinical agencies compiled by the Board office for nursing education programs to peruse, and possibly select, for their students' clinical experiences with actual patients.

Well, how does the eppiccNURSE database impact current nursing licensees? It does so in three key ways: 1) supporting nursing capacity by mitigating workforce shortages; 2) assuring nursing students are prepared to enter complex care environments by receiving instruction from qualified faculty; and 3) processing nursing graduates' applications for licensure by exam and temporary practice permits more efficiently for earlier entry into practice.

The eppiccNURSE supports nursing capacity while mitigating workforce shortages by supporting the growth and expansion of nursing education programs, enabling them to continue to accept qualified students. From a national perspective, according to the *United States Bureau of Labor Statistics Employment Projections* for the period of 2010-2020, the registered nurse (RN) workforce is the top occupation in terms of job growth through 2020. The total number of job openings for nurses due to growth and replacement will be 1.2 million. In addition, the executive summary of the *Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry, Center for Workforce Information and Analysis 2010 - 2011* survey report for RNs states that**,** "16% percent of RN respondents employed in Pennsylvania plan to leave health care within the next five years." A similar 2012 report for licensed practical nurses (LPN) indicates that "17% percent of LPNs employed in nursing in Pennsylvania plan to also leave nursing within the next five years." This is a concern since nurses are major contributors, as members of highly skilled interdisciplinary teams, in the provision of care to individuals with acute and chronic disease

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The Commonwealth's more than 140 nursing education programs prepare individuals as RNs or LPNs in accordance to specific standards as set forth by the Board. In preparing future nurses to enter complex work environments, clinical experience with actual patients is a key component of their education. Currently, the system contains close to 3,500 clinical agencies where students are engaged in supervised clinical experiences. In a June 25, 2013 news release from Dr. Beverly Malone, RN, CEO, of the National League for Nursing (NLN), she states that "one crucial element continuing to mar nursing education programs and the preparation of our future nurses is the shortage of clinical placement settings." The eppiccNURSE database system supports the nursing education programs by enhancing their ability to identify and have quickly approved appropriate clinical agencies contributing to program expansion and improved quality of students' clinical learning experiences.

Through the eppiccNURSE database the Board has approved and aggregated information related to the Commonwealth's greater than 5000 nursing faculty along with their qualifications. In doing this, the Board assures that faculty meet the

established regulatory requirements and that nursing students receive instruction from qualified faculty. This effort along with the development of the master clinical agency list supports our nursing education programs' educational initiatives.

The eppiccNURSE database allows the secure and direct submission of nursing graduates' program completion documents of which there are close to 10,000 submitted every year. This system also automatically interfaces with the Board's licensing record system and automatically matches the nursing program completion documents with the graduates' application. As a result, processing times are more efficient for applicants applying for licensure by exam and temporary practice permits. This contributes to the economic growth of the health care industry by supporting earlier entry into practice.

Healthcare is changing rapidly and becoming increasingly complex. One change that has been introduced to assist in handling this complexity is the use of robust and sophisticated information technology systems such as eppiccNURSE. This system has transformed the manner in which the Board supports nursing throughout the Commonwealth.