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## To improve health care, bring in the nurses - stat

By Susan B. Hassmiller and Susan Reinhard

Tribune News Service

on December 28, 2014 - 12:01 AM

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Some of the largest health care systems in America do not have any nurses serving on their boards of directors. That is a huge oversight, especially in a time of rapid change in health care delivery, when consumers and providers would benefit from having nurses' frontline perspective present in boardrooms as health care policy decisions are made.

Last month, nurse leaders from 21 national nursing and other health-related organizations came together to change that. The nursing leaders launched the national Nurses on Boards Coalition, which has a goal to put 10,000 nurses on boards of corporate and nonprofit health care organizations by 2020.

The effort is a direct response to the Institute of Medicine's call in 2010 for nurses to play more pivotal decision-making roles on boards and commissions in improving the health of all Americans. The institute's landmark report, "The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health," established that strong leadership from nurses is an essential element in transforming health care delivery and improving patient care.

It seems the institute's call has not reached much of America.



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The American Hospital Association’s Trustee Magazine in September summed it up best: “Without a nurse trustee, boards lack an authority on the patient experience, quality and safety, and perspective from the largest part of the hospital workforce.”

The absence of nurses in leadership positions comes as hospitals, medical groups and insurance companies claim they’ve become more patient-friendly in a health care system increasingly putting more emphasis on prevention.

While doctors fill 20 percent of hospital board seats, nurses comprise just 6 percent, reported Trustee Magazine, which cited the most recent American Hospital Association governance survey.

The dearth of nurses serving on boards stands in stark contrast to the fact that nurses comprise the largest segment of the U.S. health care workforce – at 3 million strong. More than any other health care provider, nurses bring the perspective of the patient.

Consider that nursing practice covers health promotion, disease prevention, coordination of care, cure and palliative care when cure is not possible.

Nurses provide the majority of care in hospitals, nursing homes, clinics and outpatient settings. They are on the front lines in making sure care is delivered safely, effectively and compassionately in these and other settings. And nurses are the ones who not only tend to patients’ physical health needs but also respond to their social, mental and spiritual needs.

With federal health care reform, health care providers are in the midst of reworking care delivery to make it more accessible, accountable and affordable, while putting an emphasis on prevention and primary care.

Nurses already play a huge role on the front lines. It’s time they begin playing a role in the boardroom, too, bringing both their practical sensibilities and view of patient care experiences to the table.

The nation’s largest health care philanthropy, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the 38 million-member AARP, believe nurses must have a voice in the boardrooms of the health care organizations we trust to care for us. Backed by the foundation and AARP, the Future of Nursing: Campaign for Action is driven by the Institute of Medicine’s evidence-based recommendations. Nurse representation is our best hope of truly achieving high-quality care that is accessible, affordable and compassionate.

Susan B. Hassmiller, Ph.D., R.N., F.A.A.N., is the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation senior adviser for nursing and director of the Future of Nursing: Campaign for Action. Susan Reinhard, R.N., Ph.D., F.A.A.N., is a senior vice president at AARP, where she directs its Public Policy Institute and is chief strategist for AARP’s Center to Champion Nursing in America.

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**Sue Tetzlaff** · a year ago

I love the idea of more nurses serving in governance - It might be a big leap since many nursing leaders who are in official leadership capacities in healthcare organizations don't get the respect and voice that the CFO gets when in front of a board.

^ | ▾ · Reply · Share ▾



Guest · a year ago

"And nurses are the ones who not only tend to patients' physical health needs but also respond to their social, mental and spiritual needs"----so much for the pharmacists, respiratory therapists, social workers, dietitians, nurses aides, physicians, discharge planners, surgeons, chaplains and others.....

Just another corporate pfoof with an agenda....not that I am against nurses in the boardroom.....but....healthcare today is best served with a team approach...for 1 team element to claim superiority or greater importance is myopic, self-centered, and self-serving.....

Oh....and AARP.....the poster child for myopic, self-centered, and self-serving.....

^ | ▾ · Reply · Share ▾



**Jon Sweeney** · a year ago

I thought we had this figured out a couple of days ago, the local sycophant claimed we need more solar panels..

^ | ▾ · Reply · Share ▾



Guest → **Jon Sweeney** · a year ago

I don't recall seeing any recent posts from you referencing solar panels.....

1 ^ | ▾ · Reply · Share ▾



**joe** · a year ago

healthcare reform is going to take a lot more than nurses. we need to change the way we deliver healthcare, and go to single payer system, everyone in, no escape clauses for religion or other silly reasons.

my sister is an E.R. nurse and I cannot tell you how much I respect nurses they do a job I could never do, they are indeed, special people, however this nurse has taken a bit of a narrow viewpoint here.

3 ^ | ▾ · Reply · Share ▾



**Jon Sweeney** → **joe** · a year ago

Awesome, you progressives sure are original

Governor Shumlin's Surrender: Vermont Democrats Abandon Quest ...  
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Cached4 days ago ... "Vermont... is the only state with universal single-payer health coverage for ...

That turned out to be good news for single payer foes locally and ...

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**44guyton** → **Jon Sweeney** · a year ago

Look how single payer works in England. It doesn't. But that won't stop

progressives ans socialist.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



**PeterJRobbins** → Jon Sweeney · a year ago

Jon, did you even read this op-ed or just the comment from Joe? This is the opinions of two very corporate connected nurses. They state "Nurses already play a huge role on the front lines. It's time they begin playing a role in the boardroom, too, bringing both their practical sensibilities and view of patient care experiences to the table." I can see the benefit of bringing the perspective of nurses to the board room as their jobs bring them closer to actual delivery of health care. Let us hope that nurse input is listened to, especially with the domination of bean counters over patient care.

As for your comments on single payer, you need to note that the plan that Gov. Shumlin was pushing in VT was not a single payer plan and because of that, it did not generate the savings he thought he could promote. Single payer in NY or all of the US can and will generate savings while helping to deliver quality care and cover everybody. Wouldn't you like a healthcare plan that offers no copays, no deductibles, no lifetime limits, no out-of-network providers that would come to you at a lower overall cost? What wouldn't you like about this?

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**Skeptical Inquirer** → PeterJRobbins · a year ago

His investments in health care companies might suffer.

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