

Diversity in the Boardroom: Consider a nurse

By Laurie Benson

With many changes occurring in the health care industry, and with health care projected to remain the largest employee-related expense for U.S. employers, now is the time for the voice of nurse leaders to be heard.

As a nurse leader and board director for many years, I have experienced firsthand the importance of nurses serving in a wide range of governance roles.

Nurses historically are underrepresented on hospital and other boards of directors of publicly traded companies. Without a nurse, boards miss the perspective of the most honest and ethical profession, as ranked in the annual Gallup poll for the last 16 consecutive years, as well as representation of the largest segment of the health care workforce.

As health care costs grow for all companies and corporate concerns about funding and compliance multiply, nurses can offer insights into how to manage these and other risks.

“Without exception, nursing representatives on the board have proved to be invaluable,” says John W. Bluford, III, past chair, American Hospital Association; president, Bluford Healthcare Leadership Institute; and president emeritus, Truman Medical Centers. “They were not so much an advocate for nursing, but they advocated for the needs of patients,” he explains. “As the board focused on matters of care quality, the voice of nursing was both critical and creditable.”

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The Nurses on Boards Coalition (NOBC) was launched November 2014 with support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Center to Champion Nursing in America (CCNA). The Institute of Medicine's 2011 report, “The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health,” called for nurses to play a more pivotal decision-

making role on boards and commissions. NOBC represents national nursing and other organizations working to build healthier communities in America by increasing the presence of nurses on corporate and health-related boards, as well as other boards, panels and commissions.

All boards can benefit from the nursing perspective.

The nursing profession has evolved to include a diverse group of professionals dedicated to serving patients, families and communities and is ideally suited to bring unique perspectives to the boardroom.

Nurses possess a wide range of skills including strategic planning, critical thinking, communications, quality and process improvement, communications, human resources, finance, and complex problem solving. Accustomed to working in teams, nurses fit naturally into the boardroom environment. Always connected to the mission, they understand the challenges, opportunities and implications of decisions on many levels.

NOBC has a ready pool of diverse candidates with over 10,000 nurses registered in the NOBC database, many who are interested in serving on an additional board, or their first board. To advance its mission, NOBC works with organizations to identify candidates who are a good fit with the desired skill sets, qualifications and experience for board leadership.

The evolving health care landscape calls out for change. As you expand your board candidate pool to include more diverse candidates and perspectives, include a nurse.