Global Licensure: New Modalities of Treatment and Care Require the Development of New Structures and Systems to Access Care

Ruben D. Fernandez, MA, RN; George J. Hebert, MA, RN, APN,C

As healthcare continues to be impacted by unrelenting external forces that are transforming the healthcare system and the practice of nursing, attention must be paid to the impact of electronic technologies in shaping professional practice, regulation, the national interstate practice model, and the global marketplace. Emerging innovations in practice and education will challenge existing laws and regulations. Maintaining open communication among major stakeholders and working collaboratively to shape a preferred future will enhance practice and meet consumer expectations. An analysis of the challenges to the scope of practice in the global marketplace is explored. Medicine of the future will not be based on blood and guts, but on bits and bytes (Pfizer J. 2001;5(2):20–25). Key words: challenges, collaboration, electronic technologies, innovations

The global marketplace as an electronic medium is a reflection of our world view, discipline, and commercial interests. It influences our discipline through real-time communication, access to critical information as well as informal and formal education. The full implication of the global market technologic revolution is not known yet but healthcare has already changed because of it. The impact of this form of interactive technology comprises a system for unprecedented change influencing the way we think, communicate, and relate personally and professionally, the way we practice and regulate nursing practice. The global marketplace is driven in large part by advances in the use of the Internet for information collecting, sharing, and management, like telehealth. The creation of such a boundless environment presents challenges for the practice and regulation of nursing.

Advances in electronic communication technology have become an unpredictable force and challenge for a healthcare culture that has as its basic core assumptions and predictions. One of the reasons that the future of globalization encouraged by the Internet and telehealth cannot be predicted with any assurance is because of the ongoing debate about the regulation of nursing practice at the professional, state, national, and international levels. The debate encompasses the medium, the technology, regulatory statutes, practice acts, standardization of educational curricula, core competencies, and scope of nursing practice. The challenge for policy makers and regulatory bodies is to keep abreast of change despite its unpredictable nature. It has been asserted by Giorgianni in his provocative editorial on E-Health technologies that because of the unpredictability and complexity of

From the Pulsesides Medical Center, North Bergen, NJ (Mr Fernandez); and the New Jersey Board of Nursing, Newark, NJ (Mr Hebert).

The opinions expressed in this article are the sole responsibility of the author and in no way represent or speak on behalf of the Office of the Attorney General, the Division of Consumer Affairs, the New Jersey Board of Nursing, or any of its agents or representatives.

Corresponding author: Ruben D. Fernandez, MA, RN, 35 Rongari Dr, West Orange, NJ 07052 (e-mail: RongariDrive@Aol.com).
Internet technologies, the challenge for regulators and policy makers is "to evolve reasonable regulation in a thoughtful way that protects people and protects this very important medium and technology." Giorgianni asserts that people around the world are incorporating Internet technology into their everyday lives by creating new and complex issues in commerce, information access, consumer protection, intellectual property, medical practices, and privacy. He cites that in response to attempts to regulate content on the Internet.

A landmark 1997 decision was made by the U.S. Supreme Court, which rules that the Internet is a unique medium entitled to the highest protection of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, thus making the Internet the first electronic medium to achieve free speech protection similar to print.

It is through the use of this electronic media that nursing practice will cultivate and superimpose their expanding roles as care providers in a global culture and society.

THE INTERNET AND PARAMETERS OF CARE

The public's need to determine the parameters of self-care through the use of the Internet will further impact the way in which we educate individuals to practice nursing. Thomas Ferguson, MD, Editor and Publisher of the Ferguson Report, a highly regarded online newsletter free for health and computer-literate professional (www.fergusonreport.com), maintains that the patient has access to the primary care provider, the specialist, online professional help, online self-help, online pharmacy, search engines, self-help niche sites and more. In information age healthcare, patients play a more active role. The healthcare professionals, in addition to providing care, serve as facilitators of self-managed care.

In assessing the way in which the Internet is changing healthcare, Dr Ferguson examines its impact from an anthropological perspective in determining the incongruence between practice and consumerism in relation to this electronic medium. He maintains, "There are typically five stages that a culture goes through when it adopts a new technology: 1) ignore; 2) resist; 3) substitute; 4) innovate and transform. Most health professionals are still in the first two or three stages, while many patients have progressed to stage four or five. Thus, many patients are operating in the mode of information age healthcare while the providers are still practicing industrial age medicine."

To further illustrate his point, it is worth noting that 1 in every 3 online consumers seek health products, and it is projected that 8% of all retail health sales will move to the Internet by 2004. The Internet features as many as 100,000 sites devoted to health, with Internet-literate consumers raising from 9% in 1995 to 56% of all adults in 1999.

EMERGING LICENSING AND PRACTICE ISSUES

This milieu challenges the profession to pay close attention to emerging licensing and practice issues. Professions, practices, and licensing activities must be reviewed to assure public protection and increase public confidence. To really serve the public interest there should be clearly stated expectations that professional regulatory entities will continue to contribute to the public policy debate on health promotion, treatment, and prevention, with emphasis on maintaining competence, measurable outcomes, quality improvement, disciplinary action, and remediation for poor practice. With the explosion of electronic technology it will be a long time before we know whether the challenges to practice, the threats of professional discipline, charges in the courts, or public challenges will validate the tremendous benefit of these technologies in our practice.

Nurses strive to protect the interest of their patients in matters related to health, safety, practice, and patient rights. Likewise, nurses are individuals responsible and accountable.
for the care they provide. Inherent in the nurses' rights is the ethical responsibility to preserve their own integrity and safety. The Code of Ethics for Nurses With Interpretive Statements maintains that nurses are faced with decisions in the context of increased complexity and changing patterns in the delivery of healthcare. As the scope of nursing practice changes, the nurse must exercise judgment in accepting responsibility and seeking consultation.

This interpretive statement provides direction and a framework that should guide the evolution of nursing practice by encouraging practitioners to embrace new modalities of change, like the incorporation of electronic technologies such as Internet resources to enhance care delivery.

There are a myriad of challenges presented by electronic technologies: among them are the philosophical premise of the constructs mandated in the Code for Nurses, the ever-expanding role of the nurse, professional standards, concern about reliability and accuracy of information online, changes in a global market practice environment that necessitate professional and regulatory bodies redefine public policy as it relates to public safety through the provision of competent nursing care. There are a variety of initiatives that are currently being undertaken concerning these issues. These change efforts range from state efforts at standardizing nursing curricula to state statute and regulation changes governing the scope of practice. Some of the changes will be addressing a national interstate nursing practice model, the next logical step being an international licensing model.

IMPACT OF ELECTRONIC TECHNOLOGIES

The underpinning assumptions for this change are predicated on the current changes that the Internet revolution has placed on the healthcare culture as asserted in the Pfizer Journal. The 1999 Pfizer Medical Futures Forum addressed the full implications and transforming effects of Internet technology on healthcare. The forum panelists described the practice changes in Internet technology with the following assumptions:

1. The Internet is changing how people receive healthcare information.
2. The Internet is raising new challenges for the government’s role in healthcare.
3. Because of the Internet, professional education will never be the same.
4. Healthcare publishing is fundamentally changing because of the Internet.
5. The Internet is changing relationships in healthcare.
6. Economic relationships in healthcare are changing because of the Internet.

To these assumptions the authors add the following challenges that globalization and the Internet pose to the profession of nursing and those that the regulators and policy makers must still address:

1. Consistency of language that is used to define the practice and scope of nursing.
2. Issues of standardization of initial and continuing practice competencies.
3. The need for a uniform nurse practice act.
4. The need to recognize professional credentialing centers to further ensure competency.
5. Issues of malpractice claims liability associated with the use of technology.

The public, the healthcare community, and regulatory bodies will have to work in tandem to assure public safety and protection as new national and international models of nursing education, licensure, and practice are explored.

GLOBALIZATION AND CREDENTIALING

Furthermore, the advent of the Internet, telehealth, and global migration have been in many instances the driving force in breaking down barriers to interstate nursing practice. With globalization migration has become a rising phenomenon. An estimated 100 million
people are on the move worldwide, crossing regions, countries, and international borders. Millions of people cross international borders every single day. In 1995 the American Academy of Nursing released its first expert panel report on global migration and health. Their report touches on the effect of global development in regional, national, and international spheres. This break with parochialism heightened by awareness of globalization is reflected in "the North American Free Trade Agreement, emerging microbes, internet connections, and ethnic and racial diversity on a shrinking planet." This migration phenomenon supports the need for an international credentialing of immigrant nurses to ensure public safety as defined in the International Council of Nurses. Structures like the Commission on Graduates of Foreign Nursing Schools (CGFNS) provide a consumer service that evaluates whether or not the information provided by all foreign nursing education systems reflects the required comprehensive nursing standards of the American education system.

It is evident that the Internet has changed human interactions in healthcare. This phenomenon will further escalate as technology evolves and practitioners as well as consumers will further utilize online resources to bring the delivery of healthcare to heights never seen before. Patients will be able to select practitioners from different sites; choose providers based on their online profiles, which can be validated through existing and expanding databases; as well as fill prescriptions from a worldwide spectrum of potential pharmacies.

**CONCLUSION**

New models for practice will continue to emerge to manage change, care, and plan for the future. Electronic technologies provide an opportunity to develop a new identity for nursing practice. New regulatory requirements will emerge to meet the need of practitioners to ensure public safety. As a new paradigm for ensuring competencies and self-regulation in a global market evolves, the need to explore global licensure will emerge. The future belongs to those who will accept the challenge to make a difference in a global marketplace and take the necessary risks to make things happen.

**REFERENCES**