Transformational ideas are everywhere

By Michelle Greanias

Transforming U.S. healthcare to be more person-centric, forward-looking, and technology-enabled is a formidable objective and will require innovation across education, regulation, and nursing practice. However, as the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated, when nurses and other healthcare providers are in alignment, rapid innovation can occur even in a system as large and complex as healthcare. When the American Nurses Foundation (Foundation) launched the Reimagining Nursing (RN) Initiative, we knew ideas were out there to unleash the potential of a diverse, dynamic nursing workforce to propel us into a healthier future. For instance, in our COVID-19 Survey on Innovation (tinyurl.com/3cc4fm75), 84% of nurse respondents reported being involved in an innovation during the pandemic, confirming the breadth of creativity in nursing.

We chose specific areas of focus for the RN Initiative—education, technology, and direct reimbursement—where change has been slow and bold action is needed to overcome inherent systemic barriers. And nurses responded with nearly 350 ideas to equip and enable nurses with leading-edge knowledge, tools, environments, and systems to deliver even more exemplary care.

Ideas came from 48 states, D.C., and Puerto Rico. They came from rural areas, urban areas, and everywhere in between. They came from acute care, but also from communities, schools, and workplaces. Some ideas focused on how nurses could follow a patient across different care settings. Many supported caring for patients at home. Nurses from health systems, universities, community colleges, nursing associations, technology companies, and many other types of institutions shared their ideas to transform nursing.

We heard new approaches to nursing education that would better support students from underserved areas so they enter their careers more practice-ready to serve their communities, delivering more nurses with similar lived experience to their patients. We learned the potential for technology to transform clinical experiences and validate student competencies. And we saw the blueprints for bridges transitioning nursing students from the academic to the practice environments more seamlessly.

We expected our technology focus area to result in a wide range of ideas and that’s what we received. Proposed innovations addressed a single nursing task or specialty, using technologies such as artificial intelligence, robotics, and simulation to streamline nursing workflows, enhance nurse competencies, and create efficiencies. Others supported nurses to more comprehensively meet patient needs, including addressing social determinants of health. Still others advanced access to care by making it easier for nurses to meet patients where they are both in person and virtually, using telehealth and a variety of remote monitoring approaches.

The ideas to expand nursing practice supported by direct reimbursement to nurses for care delivery, management, and coordination showed the potential to significantly expand entrepreneurial opportunities for nurses and access to nursing care for patients. These ideas were proposed in clinics and schools, in rural and urban areas, and virtually. They outlined pathways to securing both government and private payers.

With the help of a dedicated group of nurses and nurse allies who are subject-matter experts in these areas, the Foundation is completing the difficult task of selecting 10 to 11 ideas to pilot over the next 3 years. We look forward to sharing details about these innovators and their bold ideas in March.

— Michelle Greanias is program director for the American Nurses Foundation.

To learn more, visit the RN Initiative at nursing-world.org/foundation/programs/rninitiative.