

INTRODUCING

Nurses on Boards

Making the case to your healthcare organization

Nurses, the largest proportion of hospital staff, the most trusted profession, and those responsible for the most direct patient care, are significantly underrepresented as decision makers.

A national effort is underway to change this, and you can be involved.

This document highlights the impacts nurses are having on boards of directors and provides a roadmap for advocating to your organization's leadership and board that having a nurse as a voting member can improve the health of your patients.

Stories of impact from the hospital C-Suite

"Kathy [Mershon, MSN, RN, CNAA, FAAN] first and foremost earned the respect and trust of the board as a very strong business leader and colleague with substantial health care experience. She could stand toe-to-toe with any board member on any topic. She also brought nursing experience and the unique dimension of clinical care, an array of experiences and perspectives our board didn't have before....**You could clearly show statistics and graphs for a variety of outcomes measures that could be tied directly to Kathy's input and expectations.**"

Richard Hachten, former president of Alegen Health

"the role nurse board members have played around our focus and improvement on quality of patient safety initiatives across CHI has been paramount. In the earlier days of CHI, we put a major focus on quality at the local governance level. We have really progressed and worked on developing our quality initiatives from a system perspective...It's fairly common to have physicians on boards. But nurses have a different perspective, different experiences, different backgrounds and training and education."

Kevin Lofton, CEO of Catholic Health Initiatives

Nursing excellence

The ability for a nurse to bring the focus of quality and patient safety to the boardroom can benefit your organization's ability to provide the best care and may help meet credentialing standards.

By the numbers

37% of hospitals have at least 1 nurse on their board of directors.

75% of hospitals have at least 1 physician.

5% of all hospital board seats are held by nurses. 20% of all hospital board seats are held by physicians.

6,000+ nurses nationwide have volunteered to serve on a board.

According to a study released in the November-December 2015 *American Journal of Medical Quality*, a survey of CEOs of U.S. academic medical centers found that [high performing hospitals were more likely to have nurses as voting members](#) when compared to low-performing boards.

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Independent Directors

With 3.8 million nurses nationwide, nurse leaders who are external to your hospital or health system and its competitors can be found in academic settings, industry, and within the broader community. While many boards have formal policies that limit the number of employees serving as voting members, this does not need to be a deterrent.

The CNO's role

Often a Chief Nursing Officer attends board meetings as a staff person. This offers critical insight in an [advisory role](#) and offers valuable leadership development opportunity for the CNO, however, the CNO is not a board member. A nurse in a voting board member position enables an increase in peer-to-peer conversations that can impact the hospital's strategic priorities in a different way.

The Roadmap

Know your board

Look at the current composition of your board. What industries are represented? Do board members represent diverse background and experiences?

Begin the dialogue with your leadership and board

Are they open to having a nurse serve on the board?

What competencies would they expect of a successful board member?

How is the board managing their succession planning? When do they expect a seat to open?

Activate your network

As a nurse leader, get to know other nurse leaders in the community. Reach out to them, particularly those not affiliated with your system or a competitor. Network, learn about their leadership abilities, and expertise. When an opportunity becomes available, you will be able to confidently recommend a nurse who you know will be the right fit and will be a good partner.

If you need assistance in identifying other candidates, contact the [American Nurses Foundation](#).

Use resources and research

- [American Hospital Association Trustee Services](#) shares a wealth of trustee-focused resources, tools and education. Use articles on the Good Governance Practices to inform your conversations.
- [Nursing Engagement in Governing Health Care Organizations](#)
- ["Building an Exceptional Board: Effective Practices for Health Care Governance Report of the Blue Ribbon Panel on Health Care Governance"](#)
 - "Include physicians, nurses, and other clinicians on the board. Their clinical competence and viewpoints are valuable to other board members and will help the board better understand the needs and concerns of several of the organization's stakeholders."
- [Improve the Patient Experience – Ask a Nurse to Join the Board](#)
- Glossary of Board Terms - You do not need to be an expert in board governance to have these conversations. Here are two helpful glossaries to help with terminology.
 - [Glossary of Nonprofit Governance](#), BoardSource
 - [Glossary of Terms – Frequently used terms in corporate governance](#), Stanford Graduate School of Business

Make a difference