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New bill requires higher education for nurses

By: Gino Fanelli | December 21, 2017



A new bill requiring higher education for nurses has been signed into law by Gov. Andrew Cuomo.

Sponsored by Assembly Majority Leader Joseph Morelle, D-Irondequoit, S6768 makes it a requirement for all registered nurses to receive a baccalaureate's degree at the time of licensing, or within 10 years of having received a license to practice. Also, a nine-person committee, consisting of at least one practicing nurse, will be assembled to create guidance over a 12-month period on breaking cultural, economic and geographic barriers to nurses seeking the degree. The legislation is in response to a declaration by the National Advisory Council on Nursing Education, which recommended that two-thirds of registered nurses hold a baccalaureate's degree by 2010, with the first recommendations in New York made in 2003. The bill died in the Senate both in 2013 and 2016 before ultimately being signed into law on Thursday, Dec. 21.

The new model will not affect registered nurses already working in the field, but is designed to mirror New York State standards for teachers for nurses going forward.

"I am grateful to Governor Cuomo, Senate Majority Leader (John) Flanagan, my colleagues in the legislature and the countless advocates for coming together to ensure that our healthcare workforce has the skills necessary to meet the increasing complexities of an ever-changing health system," Morelle said, in a statement. "It has been widely demonstrated that additional learning translates to better patient outcomes and improved care. With these new standards in place we are ensuring that New Yorkers continue to receive the highest possible treatment and care."

The National Advisory Council now recommends that 80 percent of all practicing nurses hold a baccalaureate's, citing a potential for shorter patient stays, better quality of service and more complex patient care.

"I applaud Governor Cuomo for signing our important legislation that will have a great impact on improving the state's healthcare system. Bolstering educational requirements for nurses will not only advance patient care, but also help nurses keep up with the ever-progressing medical field," Flanagan said. "The law also addresses the state's nursing shortage and will make recommendations on increasing the availability and accessibility of nursing programs—to the benefit of all New Yorkers."

While the law will take immediate effect, the provision on nurses receiving their degree within 10 years will not be enacted for another 30 months.

"Rochester Regional Healthcare Association has been a strong supporter of BSN 10 legislation for many years and we applaud Majority Leader Morelle and Senator Flanagan for their leadership as well as Governor Cuomo for signing this bill into law," said president and CEO of the Rochester Regional Healthcare Association Travis Heider, in a statement. This is an important victory for patient care and evidence-based legislation. Studies have consistently shown that higher levels of education improve patient outcomes. On behalf of the 17 hospitals and healthcare systems that RRHA represents in Rochester, the Finger Lakes and the Southern Tier, we are thrilled about the bill's passage."

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