

The “Enhanced” Nurse Licensure Compact

This article will be the first of several over the next year relating to the future of nursing in the state of Iowa and in all states. This first article will be an introduction to something new and exciting in nursing: the “Enhanced” Nurse Licensure Compact.

At this point in time you may be thinking what is so exciting about a new compact? Keep an open mind and as you read; think about the future, where nursing is going, where healthcare is going, and then you will see the benefits. Before we look at the “Enhanced” Nurse Licensure Compact, we need to review the current compact and what the impetus was for change.

On July 17, 1998, the Iowa Board of Nursing voted to initiate compact legislation. By the year 2000, the law, Iowa Code, chapter 152E, included language on the Nurse Licensure Compact and rules, 655IAC, chapter 16 were in effect.

The Nurse Licensure Compact (NLC) is an interstate compact. It allows a nurse to have one multistate license in their primary state of residency. This permits the nurse to practice in other member states both physically and electronically subject to each state’s practice laws. So what is an interstate compact? An interstate compact is a statutory agreement between two or more states (party states) established for the purpose of solving a particular issue or multi-state concern.

To think of this in simple terms, the NLC is modeled after the driver’s license compact. Each of us are allowed to drive in another state with a license from the state we reside in, though we follow the rules and regulations of the state we are traveling in.

Currently there are twenty-five states which are members of the NLC. Within these twenty-five states the belief is that the practice of nursing takes place in the state where the patient resides. Therefore, if a nurse who resides in Iowa and holds an Iowa license practices in a compact state, such as Missouri, she/he would practice on their multistate license following the rules and regulations of Missouri.

This would appear to be a win win situation for both the nurse and those states which participate in the compact. The compact allows for portability of the nurse to meet the needs of patients in many states and decreases the potential of more than one licensing fee for the nurse.

So why fix what is not broken? There are many reasons for the “Enhanced” Nurse Licensure Compact as cited below:

1. Though there are 25 states which participate in the compact, there are 25 states which do not. There may be many factors as to why a state is opposed to joining the compact. One factor may be that the requirements for licensure in the compact states are not stringent enough. Currently states which participate in the compact are not required to complete background checks on initial licensure applicants or endorsements. Iowa does require background checks.
2. The Affordable Care Act (ACA) has increased access to care for nation’s growing and aging population, which in turn requires creative modalities in the delivery of healthcare.
3. The United States Congress is having national licensure discussions which would remove each state’s individual rights for licensing and governing nurses in their respective states.
4. Other health care professions are developing interstate licensure compacts (medicine, physical therapy, EMS, psychology).
5. Telehealth services are increasingly being utilized. Telehealth delivery has no geographic boundaries. A nurse or an advanced practice nurse may be practicing in a clinic in Iowa and she/he has patients all over the country who she communicates with via technology. Again, if the belief is that the practice of nursing is where the patient is, this nurse would require several licenses in those states which are not part of the compact. The need for facilitating interstate nursing practice continues to grow.

Therefore in 2013 through 2015 members of the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) met several times to redraft a new compact. The “Enhanced” Nurse Licensure Compact was approved by the membership in May of 2015. The NCSBN also approved a new Advanced Practice Registered Nurse Compact. Currently, Iowa is not initiating any legislation towards the adoption of this

compact, there are aspects of our administrative rules which must be revised before we can move forward.

As a brief reminder the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) is an independent, not-for-profit association comprised of boards of nursing from the U.S. and around the world. NCSBN is the leading source of data, information and research regarding nursing regulation and related issue. The mission of the NCSBN is to provide education, service, and research through collaboration leadership to promote evidence – based regulatory excellence for patient safety and public protection.

By now you are hopefully asking yourself what are the benefits of the “Enhanced” Nurse Licensure Compact? The following will help to answer your questions:

1. A nurse has the ability to practice in multiple states with one license.
2. The compact reduces regulatory requirements by removing the necessity for obtaining a license in each state.
3. The compact clarifies a nurse’s authority to practice in multiple states via telehealth, which in turn increases patient access to care and provides continuity of care.
4. The compact provides member states with the authority to facilitate a discipline case across state lines.
5. The compact gives nursing boards the ability to share complaint and investigative information throughout the investigative process and there is a shared responsibility for patient safety not governed by geographical boundaries. There is a commitment to the protection of the public.
6. The compact provides for uniform law, rules and policies applicable and enforceable to all compact states.

Not to confuse the issue, Iowa is presently one of the 25 states which are part of the current Nurse Licensure Compact, but as the “Enhanced” Nurse Licensure Compact becomes adopted by states the need for Iowa to adopt the new compact will become vital. The adoption of the “Enhanced” NLC will take legislative action – we must rescind the old and enact the new. During the 2016 year the goal is to educate nurses, legislators and all stakeholders concerning the “Enhanced” NLC and introduce it into the 2017 legislative session.

As I began, this is the first of several articles outlining the “Enhanced” NLC. The next article will focus on more specific details of the compact. I hope that you will read these articles and try to learn everything you can about the “Enhanced” NLC and be able to share this information with your legislator.

Healthcare is changing and it is changing rapidly. Nurses need to have mobility to meet the needs of patients and their access to care.

Information from the National Council State Boards of Nursing. (NCSBN). (2015) *The national council state boards of nursing (NCSBN) power point on the enhanced nurse licensure compact and APRN compact.*