

### RECOMMENDATION #6

#### Equip nurses and the public to be strong advocates for nursing and health care improvement

As the largest group of health care professionals, nurses occupy a central role in the health care system, providing essential care that spans from preventive health measures to acute care interventions and long-term support. Despite their critical contributions, nurses often face challenges in having their work appropriately valued, in terms of both professional recognition and financial compensation. This discrepancy highlights the need for nurses to be strong advocates for themselves and underscores the importance of public advocacy in supporting them. Self-advocacy by nurses can contribute to:

- **Recognition of expertise** - Nursing is a profession that requires extensive knowledge, specialized skills, and continuous education. Nurses must advocate for themselves to ensure their expertise is recognized within the health care hierarchy, emphasizing that nursing care is not ancillary but central to patient outcomes.
- **Professional development and advancement** - Self-advocacy is crucial for nurses seeking opportunities for professional development and career advancement. By voicing their needs for further education, specialized training, and leadership roles, nurses can break barriers to advancement and highlight the value of their contributions to health care.
- **Improved working conditions** - Nurses often work under challenging conditions, including long hours, high patient loads, and emotional stress. Self-advocacy is essential to addressing these issues, and may include demanding safer work environments, adequate staffing ratios, and resources that enable nurses to provide the best care possible.

#### **PUBLIC ADVOCACY: STRENGTHENING SUPPORT**

While nurses can advocate for themselves, public support amplifies their voices, making it more likely that policymakers, health care organizations, and society at large will take notice. Public advocacy can drive meaningful changes in how nurses are valued and treated. By rallying behind nurses, the public can help push for reforms that recognize the value of nursing care, such as fair compensation, better working conditions, and stronger representation in health care decision-making.

#### **THE PATH FORWARD**

For nursing to be appropriately valued, both self-advocacy by nurses and public advocacy on their behalf are essential. Nurses, equipped with their firsthand experiences and expertise, are uniquely positioned to articulate the challenges they face and the value they provide. These efforts can be significantly bolstered by public support, which can influence systemic changes that recognize and reward the critical work done by nurses.

Together, these forms of advocacy work synergistically to address the undervaluation of nursing care. They can lead to improved working conditions for nurses, better patient care outcomes, and a health care system that truly recognizes the indispensable role of nursing. In a time when health care faces numerous challenges, valuing and supporting nurses is more crucial than ever, requiring concerted efforts from within the profession and from society at large.

The Task Force on the Future of the Nursing Workforce recommends the following strategies to equip nurses and the public to be strong advocates for nursing and health care improvement:

**Strategy 18** – Enhance the ability of nurses to advocate for themselves and their profession (Page 109)

**Strategy 19** – Enhance the ability of the public to advocate for nurses (Page 112)