Nurses need to be able to practice to the full extent of their skill and education to meet the nation’s health care needs, a national panel announced.

Results of the 2-year Initiative on the Future of Nursing by the Institute of Medicine and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation were rolled out October 5, 2010.

“We believe this is a landmark report that will usher in a golden age of nursing in which nursing takes its rightful leadership place in American health care,” said the committee’s chair, Donna Shalala, president of the University of Miami in Florida.

She outlined the report’s 3 main recommendations at a briefing in Washington, DC:

• **Nurses should practice to the full extent of their education and training.**

  Of the nation’s 3 million nurses, more than 250,000 are qualified as advanced practice nurses with master’s and doctoral degrees and national certification. But state laws, licensing rules, and scope of practice regulations vary on how those nurses can practice.

  An example is Kansas City, split between 2 states, where nurse practitioners with the same credentials are governed by different rules in Kansas and Missouri.

  Among the recommendations is for the federal government to promote reform of state scope of practice laws by sharing and offering incentives for best practices.

• **Nurses should achieve higher levels of education and training through an improved education system that promotes seamless academic progression.**

  “We expect 80% of nurses in the US to have a bachelor’s within a decade,” Shalala said.

  The report makes no mention of eliminating any existing education programs. Instead, the focus is on making sure nurses have multiple pathways to advanced degrees that are “affordable and accessible.”

• **Nurses should be full partners with physicians and other health care professionals in redesigning health care in the US.**

  “It is the people on the ground who deliver care who need to redesign the system,” Shalala said. “Throughout the report, we talk about partnership,” she said, “not one profession substituting for another but a collaborative effort of those who represent the delivery of care to make it better.”

  A fourth recommendation calls for effective workforce planning with better data collection.
Why a new report?

Nursing has seen a lot of reports come and go. What’s different about this one? John Rowe, MD, a professor at Columbia University who is also former CEO of Mount Sinai NYU Health in New York City and former chairman and CEO of Aetna, made 2 points.

First, the report is not from nursing alone—most of the committee was made up of non-nurses from a variety of disciplines.

Second, he said, IOM’s parent, the National Academy of Sciences, “is all about the objective evaluation of evidence.” He said the committee had “concluded very clearly from the evidence that nursing can effectively and safely provide certain primary care services,” in addition to obstetrics and anesthesia care.

He said he “hoped the findings will be welcomed by the medical profession.”

As health care reform brings more than 30 million people into the system, he said, “physicians will be crushed by the demand.” Health care needs to bring to bear all of the high quality practitioners available.

The report is available at www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=12956