August 5, 2020

The nursing faculty and leadership of the Diploma, Associate Degree, Baccalaureate Degree, and Graduate Degree Nursing Programs in the state of <STATE> have partnered to request your assistance in maintaining the pipeline of graduates to fulfill the healthcare workforce needs of our state for Registered Nurses, Licensed Practical Nurses, Nurse Practitioners, and Nurse Scientists during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

In spring 2020, there were many unknowns regarding COVID-19, and all clinical nursing experiences stopped. Students scheduled to graduate in May 2020 were delayed or were only able to complete their studies via the use of virtual simulation, case studies, or other types of nonclinical laboratory experiences. Nursing students not scheduled to graduate in May 2020 generally had no further in-person clinical learning experiences following the stay-at-home order and, again, were only able to progress — if at all — through the substitution of virtual simulation, case studies, or other types of nonclinical laboratory experiences for their clinical hours.

While students were studying for work in *essential healthcare program fields*, they were not designated as *essential workers* in the state of <STATE>.

The COVID-19 pandemic will be with us for the near future. If we do not declare *students in essential healthcare program fields* to be *essential workers* and implement academic-practice partnerships to facilitate student participation in real-world clinical experiences, then graduates from nursing programs in the state of <STATE> may not have any real-life clinical experience in caring for actual patients prior to graduation. Without real-life clinical experiences, there is a strong possibility we will face a significant reduction in the healthcare workforce pipeline at a time when our country is in dire need of healthcare workers.

The inability of student nurses to complete the clinical hours necessary for competent, confident, and safe practice will:

• Severely hamper the nursing workforce in <STATE> for the foreseeable future.

• Impact future employers.

• Decrease patient safety.

To ensure safe patient care is not jeopardized, future employers will have to implement extended orientations to make up for new nursing graduates’ lack of clinical experience in not having access to clinical sites. To complicate matters, these extended employee orientations will have to occur during the continued pandemic when employer resources are already diminished and staff is stretched.

Therefore, we respectfully request your support in developing and promulgating a public statement for the development of innovative academic-practice partnerships within our state. These partnerships will ensure a pipeline of nurses so we can avoid the serious consequences of current nursing students who face a continued lack of access to real-world clinical experiences.

We respectfully request that you:

• Designate nursing students as essential healthcare workers in the state of <STATE>.

• Allow students to be considered essential members of the clinical environment so that:

▪ They can partner with employees of clinical agencies — while in remote contact with faculty — to continue their learning and maintain the healthcare workforce pipeline.

▪ They can access childcare services — like other essential workers — while continuing their healthcare education programs.

• Allow students to complete instructor-led clinicals:

▪ During periods where the COVID-19 cases are reduced, within PPE prerequisites and faculty-to-student ratios that practice sites require.

We advocate that you support the partnership of academic and practice organizations within our state to implement the public policy currently being advocated by all nursing leadership organizations in the United States including the National Council of State Boards of Nursing, National League for Nursing, American Organization for Nursing Leadership, Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing Inc., Organization for Associate Degree Nursing, NLN Commission for Nursing Education Accreditation, American Association of Colleges of Nursing, Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education, and National Student Nurses Association. [See the attached: **Policy Brief: U.S. Nursing Leadership Supports Practice/Academic Partnerships to Assist the Nursing Workforce during the COVID-19 Crisis,** March 2020.]

We respectfully request your support of local academic-practice partners as they start and/or continue to work together to identify strategies that will allow students to participate in clinical rotations and preceptorships using innovative strategies to:

• Allow students that are their current employees to complete their preceptorship or clinical hours in their institution.

• Allow students who they plan on hiring upon graduation to complete their preceptorships or clinical hours in their institution on the unit or area on which they will be hired (decreasing orientation and preceptorship onboarding costs).

Some considerations could include:

▪ Implement paid preceptorships to allow students to be designated as employees to complete their clinical or preceptorship hours.

▪ Develop joint-appointment models of clinical instruction, where the instructors of clinical groups are also nurses employed by the organization on that clinical area.

• Allow other innovative models to support real-world clinical experiences for our future nurses.

We again ask for your commitment in facilitating academic and practice partnerships in the state of <STATE> to develop evidence-based and innovative strategies to ensure a high-quality clinical educational experience for students entering the nursing workforce, to ensure patient safety, and to ensure the continuation of the pipeline of competent, caring nursing professionals in our state.