



MAKING SURE NURSES ARE TRAINED TO HELP

AARP is working to guarantee outstanding patient care as our population ages

BY MICHAEL HEDGES

As Americans age, nurses often become a critical part of their world.

That idea was behind the founding in 2007 of the Center to Champion Nursing in America by AARP and AARP Foundation, along with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The goal, says Susan Reinhard, AARP's point person at the center, is to make sure everyone has a highly trained nurse when and where he or she needs one.

"We are patient advocates, not nurse advocates," says Reinhard, director of the AARP Public Policy Institute (PPI) and chief strategist at the center. "But we work to empower nurses. We wanted to make sure they have

all the tools and training they need to help patients." Reinhard is a registered nurse with hands-on knowledge of the profession. That has given her insight into where the center could best focus its energies.

An example is the center's work to spread the idea that a four-year degree should be standard for registered nurses, with a goal that 80 percent of RNs should have a baccalaureate degree by 2020. Many hospitals have adopted the standard and are hiring to achieve the goal of better-educated staffs. "Studies showed better outcomes with that mix," Reinhard says. "If we want to change the health care system, we better have a health care workforce that is ready for that." The center is also working to make sure there is suf-

ficient diversity among America's nurses.

One focus at PPI is to study the care patients receive after leaving the hospital. "Home Alone," a landmark 2012 report, exposed the vast gap between what family caregivers were expected to do for a loved one and what most actually had the ability to do. Since then, AARP—through its state offices and with the help of others—has pushed for states to enact the CARE Act, which sets standards for what hospitals teach home caregivers before patients are released to them. As of this summer, 43 states and territories have adopted the CARE Act.

Earlier this year, a new report titled "Home Alone Revisited" showed there was more that needed to be done. AARP is now working with other groups on a series of instructional videos to demonstrate caregiving techniques at patient bedsides.

There is always a new challenge, Reinhard says. "One thing we're working on now is telehealth. The future of caregiving will involve a lot of remote interaction with nurses. Right now, there are laws that make that difficult. My nursing license is in New Jersey, but I should be able to talk to patients in Maryland."

The center is involved with a campaign—The Future of Nursing, 2020-2030—to explore coming technology changes. But Reinhard says the center's mission remains the same: "We want to make sure nurses are allowed to do what they are trained to do."

To learn more about the work of the center, go to aarp.org/nursing. ■

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SUSAN REINHARD

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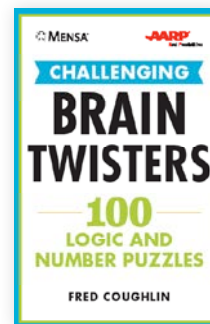
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