

THE NLN ACCREDITING PROGRAM

NLN accredits all types of nursing education programs—graduate programs for professional nurses at the masters degree level, bachelors and associate degree nursing programs in universities, senior, junior and community colleges, diploma programs offered by hospital and independent schools, and practical nursing programs. For each, accreditation is based on the principle of evaluation by a peer group. The myriad activities involved in evaluation are undertaken by the segment of the NLN membership and staff active and experienced in the type of program under review.

Masters and bachelors degree programs are evaluated by faculty members of accredited programs in senior colleges and universities. Faculty members from these programs develop and review the NLN criteria used in evaluation, make accreditation visits to the colleges and universities, and compose the board of review which makes the decision on a school's accreditation. Whenever possible, NLN visits a college or university for nursing accreditation concurrently with representatives of the regional accrediting associations in higher education who evaluate the institution as a whole. Seventy-one per cent of the baccalaureate programs hold NLN accreditation.

Diplomatic programs are evaluated by faculty members of accredited programs in hospitals and independent schools of nursing. Faculty members of accredited diploma programs develop evaluation criteria, visit schools, and compose the board of review. Sixty-nine per cent of the diploma programs throughout the country are nationally accredited.

Associate degree programs in junior and community colleges, as the newest facet of nursing education, are one of the most recent groups to utilize NLN accreditation services. Associate degree programs are growing rapidly throughout the country to meet community needs, and many are yet too new to seek national accreditation. Thus, NLN accreditation of these programs is not yet as well established as for other types of nursing education. The NLN evaluation criteria, however, provide guidelines to quality education in nursing that enable junior and community colleges to establish sound nursing programs. More and more are joining the ranks of accredited programs. As with baccalaureate programs, school visits for NLN accreditation are scheduled when possible, with visits of representatives of regional accrediting associations evaluating the college as a whole.

Practical nursing accreditation was initiated by NLN in 1966 and for the majority of these schools, too, NLN accreditation is a new and largely future goal. Criteria and evaluation procedures have been established, and the first programs approved. In offering national accreditation to practical nursing, NLN recognizes these programs as an integral part of nursing education.

ACCREDITATION IN ACTION

The experiences of a typical nursing school illustrate NLN accreditation methods and the attention to detail, the communications "musts," and the judgmental faculties exercised throughout the evaluation of a school and its nursing program.

First a school applies for accreditation. After doing so it submits a written self-evaluation report substantiating the ways in which it meets the criteria which have been established by and for the type of program it offers. The criteria are published by NLN and are available to all schools. In addition to being a guide for the preparation of the self-evaluation report, they serve as a yardstick by which a school may pace its own improvement efforts and determine its readiness for accreditation.

The self study through which a school faculty goes in order to prepare its report often is considered one of the most valuable aspects of accreditation. Teachers and administrators must look searchingly into the philosophy and purposes of the program and the ways in which the program is meeting the nursing needs of the community. They must analyze and report on the organization and administration of the school, the qualifications of faculty, the curriculum offerings, policies in effect for students in nursing, the resources and facilities used by the school to educate its students, and the methods by which the school periodically evaluates itself.

An accreditation visit then is scheduled at the convenience of the school. At least two persons always visit a school to ensure balanced judgment. Visits may be made by faculty members of the type of program under review, by an