

NLNAC receives a number of questions via phone and email. We are happy to assist you. Here are answers to three questions that are typical of those received.

QUESTION Please help us resolve an issue related to our systematic evaluation plan. On our last visit, one area needing development related to using the plan for decision making. We are now revising the plan in preparation for our next report, but we are in disagreement about what the problem really is. Can you explain?

ANSWER Occasionally, a program has difficulty using its systematic plan of evaluation as intended. The purpose of the plan is program improvement, with decisions being evidence based. The plan should be fully integrated within the program structure and *all* faculty members should be involved in the work of evaluation, actively engaged in discussions related to the data that are collected through such means as examinations, evaluations, and surveys. Data that are collected and sit on the nurse administrator's shelf are not useful. But data that are analyzed, trended, and shared can help you determine what changes, revisions, or areas of maintenance are needed.

If your plan has not been dusted off since your last accreditation visit, then it is not working for you. NLNAC does not prescribe what the plan has to look like, but the Standards and Criteria do specify that you include evaluation related to student learning and program outcomes and the NLNAC Standards. Also, the plan must reflect the work that faculty are doing toward meeting clearly identified goals or outcomes. Too often, programs make decisions and implement changes that are not apparent and cannot be found in any documentation. Evidence should be consistently and distinctly recorded in

your program documents — on the plan and within faculty meeting minutes. It should be clear to any reviewer that you are using the plan to guide your work and that data you collect have value to you.

QUESTION Our program is planning a major curriculum revision in 2010 as we will be required to implement a statewide plan that specifies new courses and general education requirements. Our next accredited visit is also in 2010, so faculty are not sure how to proceed. How do we deal with the fact that we will have two plans of study in place at the time of the visit? Also, is it true that NLNAC cannot evaluate a program if there are no outcomes for the curriculum at the time of the visit? What should we do to prepare for our visit?

ANSWER Curriculum revisions are under way in most programs. With changes in health care and higher education, it is typical for a program to be making revisions or restructuring learning experiences near or at the time of a visit. If you have two plans of study in place, with some students in an outgoing curriculum and some in the new plan, simply address this in the narrative within the Standard IV section in the self-study report. Certainly, you should not spend a great deal of time discussing the outgoing plan, but it is necessary to address changes and the evidence that led faculty to implement a new plan. It will not be an issue that the systematic evaluation plan has not been fully implemented related to outcomes within the new curriculum. Your plan will continue to reflect data related to both plans of study until the older one is phased out. What is essential is that there is a sound and thorough plan in place to evaluate the curriculum as it is developed and imple-

mented. What assessments are planned? What outcomes are expected? As outcomes are determined, these will be reported as part of the annual reporting process. Also, it is not uncommon to make adjustments to a new curriculum as it is implemented. If substantive changes are necessary, these must be reported in accordance with Policy #14.

QUESTION The nursing program in which I am a new nurse administrator has a scheduled visit next year. This is my first experience in nursing education. What do you recommend that I do to become familiar with the accreditation processes?

ANSWER Welcome to nursing education! I hope that you find your new role challenging but rewarding. I have a number of recommendations. 1) Reach out to colleagues within your state and region from all types of nursing programs. Most will be supportive and willing to share their experiences with accreditation. 2) I highly encourage all new administrators to register for a Self-Study Forum, whether or not you have an immediate visit. Here you will be introduced to the Accreditation Standards and Criteria in a step-by-step format and you will become familiar with accreditation processes. It is a good idea to identify key faculty to accompany you to the Forum as you begin to form work groups and begin the self-review process. 3) You will want to visit the NLNAC website to introduce yourself to the information available. Be sure and print a copy of the *Guidelines for the Preparation of the Self-Study Report* and other resources available on the site. These will assist you in the accreditation process and help you learn more about your program. 