

Conference Report



FUTURE OF NURSING THROUGH NURSING PRACTICE, INNOVATION, EDUCATION, AND RESEARCH: A PROCEEDING PAPER

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.65241/wh.8.2.2>

For citation: Tolarba JE, Daley KM, O'Sullivan CK, Etcher LA. Future of nursing through nursing practice, innovation, education, and research: A proceeding paper. *World of Health*. 2025;2(8):9-13. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.65241/wh.8.2.2>

Received: 4 November 2025 | Revised: 20 November 2025 | Accepted: 20 November 2025

ABSTRACT

This proceeding paper synthesizes insights from the Nursing Practice, Innovation, Education, and Research (PIER) 2025 Conference, which featured a statewide panel discussion of nine nurse leaders and one moderator. The 90-minute dialogue centered on five domains vital to the future of nursing: access to high-quality care, transforming nursing education, promoting leadership, collecting workforce data, and establishing future priorities. Proceedings were transcribed, cross-checked with field notes and recordings, and systematically analyzed to ensure rigor and accuracy. Panelists underscored the urgency of expanding access through advanced practice roles, strengthening academic-practice partnerships, and embedding simulation and residency models to support new graduates. Leadership preparation – including mentorship, financial fluency, and board representation – was emphasized as key to influencing policy and operations. Comprehensive workforce data were identified as essential to advancing equity and informing decision-making, while innovation, resilience, and well-being were highlighted as critical to sustaining the profession. Though derived from regional discussions, the findings have broad applicability across national and global contexts.

Keywords: Nursing practice, transformation, leadership, innovations, mentorship.

INTRODUCTION

Nursing is widely recognized as the most trusted profession and occupies a central position in healthcare delivery by connecting patients, providers, and communities (1). In the current complex healthcare environment, nursing encounters significant challenges and opportunities. Workforce shortages, disparities in care, and technological advancements necessitate solutions and ongoing evolution within the profession. This proceeding paper is informed by the perspectives of nurse leaders who participated in a recent statewide panel discussion convened by the Nursing Practice, Innovation, Education, and Research (PIER) Conference on August 4, 2025, at the Sacred Heart University Center for Healthcare Education in Fairfield, CT. By leveraging their diverse expertise, the document aims to inform strategic planning and policy development by presenting actionable insights for the nursing profession. The importance of this paper lies in its timely exploration of the future of nursing during a period marked by workforce shortages, growing health disparities, and the rapid integration of technology in healthcare. By putting nursing at the center of these evolving challenges, the paper underscores the profession's essential role in ensuring access to equitable, evidence-based, and patient-centered care. Unlike abstract policy recommendations, the insights in this proceeding paper emerge from a diverse panel of practicing nurse leaders who brought lived expertise from academic, clinical, and policy domains. This practice-informed perspective ensures that the priorities outlined here are not only theoretically sound but also directly applicable to the realities of contemporary healthcare systems.

What makes this paper unique is its systematic synthesis of real-time dialogue among nurse leaders, captured, transcribed, and cross-checked for accuracy to preserve authenticity. While prior scholarship has stressed collaboration, leadership, and innovation in nursing, this paper contributes a distinctive, practice-grounded position statement derived from consensus-building among leaders across multiple sectors. By transforming local and regional discussions into broadly applicable recommendations, it bridges the gap between academic discourse and frontline leadership insights. This translation of lived experience into actionable strategies represents a valuable contribution for guiding education, policy, and practice as nursing positions itself as both the backbone and driver of health system transformation.

METHODS

The analysis of this proceeding paper is grounded in The Future of Nursing 2020-2030: Charting a Path to Achieve Health Equity, which emphasizes the critical role of nurses in

delivering high-quality healthcare, advancing health equity, and aligning nursing priorities with broader healthcare transformation efforts (2).

This paper is based on data extracted from transcripts of a structured panel discussion – featuring nine nurse leaders as panelists and one moderator over a 90-minute session – representing academia, practice, industry, and professional groups. Panelists provided viewpoints from practice, education, research, policy, and leadership (Table 1). To ensure rigor in writing, the proceedings from the panel discussion of nurse leaders were transcribed verbatim and cross-checked for accuracy. The research team relied on detailed field notes taken during the 90-minute session, which were compared with the transcript to confirm consistency and completeness. Key themes and insights were identified through repeated readings of the proceedings, and the accuracy of interpretation was strengthened through team discussions that minimized bias and promoted consensus. This process ensured that the position statement was grounded in the authentic perspectives of the panelists and faithfully reflected the discourse that emerged during the session.

Table 1. Panelist Biosketches

Name of panelist	Function and working place
Chief Mutáwi Mutáhash	Dr. Marilynn “Lynn” Malerba – The 18 th Chief of the Mohegan Tribe, the first female Chief in modern history, and former 45th Treasurer of the United States (2022–2024)
Karen Daley, PhD, RN	Dean of Sacred Heart University’s Dr. Susan L. Davis and Richard J. Henley College of Nursing since 2021
Christina McCulloch, MBA, BSN, RN	President of Sharon Hospital and Interim Chief Nursing Executive at Nuvance Health
Dr. Ellen M. Komar, DNP, MPA, RN, NEA-BC	Senior Vice President of Patient Care Services and Chief Nursing Officer at Stamford Health
Dr. Ena Williams, PhD, MBA, RN, CENP, FAAN	Senior Vice President and Chief Nursing Executive at Yale New Haven Health
Liz Longmore, MSN, RN	Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer at Stamford Health
Sarah Matney, MSOL, BSN, RN, CPON, CENP	Senior Vice President of Clinical Operations and Chief Nursing Officer at Connecticut Children’s
Michelle Robertson, RN, BSN, MBA	Chief Operating Officer of Nuvance Health, with accountability for system operations and strategic initiatives
Dr. Susan L. Davis, EdD, RN	Managing partner at Healthcare Strategic Solutions, LLC and accomplished executive who has held senior leadership positions in a wide range of healthcare settings
Dr. Tina Loarte-Rodriguez (Moderator)	Executive Director, CT Center for Nursing Workforce; nurse leader, innovator, and health equity advocate

DISCUSSION

The panel discussion at the Nursing PIER 2025 Conference provided a rich and dynamic exchange among nine nurse leaders and one moderator, highlighting both the challenges and opportunities shaping the future of nursing. The dialogue reflected the collective wisdom of leaders from academia, practice, and policy who shared perspectives on advancing access, education, leadership, workforce development, and innovation. From this exchange, five central themes emerged:

1. ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY CARE

Nurses are consistently at the frontline of care delivery, ensuring patients receive high-quality and safe care. They are uniquely positioned to identify gaps, address inequities, and implement innovations in care models.

Key insights and discussion points:

- Nurses fill systemic gaps, particularly during crises such as COVID-19, through advanced practice roles.
- Nurse-led initiatives such as early catheter removal, fall prevention, and early intervention improve patient outcomes.
- Magnet-designated organizations provide evidence of the impact of professional governance on patient safety and quality.
- Access is not only about quantity but quality – nurses ensure evidence-based, patient-centered care across populations.

2. TRANSFORMING NURSING EDUCATION

Nursing education must adapt to rapidly evolving healthcare requirements. The field is currently transforming through the adoption of innovative educational models, expanded partnerships, and an increased emphasis on interdisciplinary learning.

Key insights and discussion points:

- Expansion of accelerated pathways and 2+2 programs increase accessibility to higher degrees.
- Simulation-based learning builds competence and confidence in safe environments.
- Academic-practice partnerships support students financially while addressing workforce shortages.
- Residency programs strengthen novice-to-expert transition and reduce early attrition.
- Nurse practitioner programs address behavioral health and primary care shortages.
- COVID-19 demonstrated the potential of creative models, including clinical substitution with real-world engagement.

3. PROMOTING NURSING LEADERSHIP

Leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping healthcare delivery and policy. Nurse leaders contribute a patient-centered perspective to decision-making processes, which are frequently influenced by financial and operational priorities.

Key insights and discussion points:

- Nurses must be represented at decision-making tables with executives such as COOs and CMOs.
- Financial fluency empowers nurse leaders to align quality with fiscal responsibility.
- Mentorship and leadership development programs build a pipeline of diverse future leaders.
- Representation on boards and in political offices expands nursing's policy influence.
- Hybrid leadership models combine clinical expertise with leadership responsibilities to prepare future leaders.

4. COLLECTING WORKFORCE DATA

Comprehensive data collection is essential for effective advocacy, workforce planning, and promoting equity in workforce distribution. High-quality data allows the nursing profession to demonstrate its contributions and justify the allocation of necessary resources.

Key insights and discussion points:

- Data collection must extend beyond headcounts to include retention, well-being, and transition metrics.
- Metrics demonstrate the return on investment of nursing initiatives and justify staffing models.
- Visibility through workforce data challenges the narrative of nurses as cost centers only.
- National data on workforce diversity is essential to addressing inequities in education and practice.

5. PRIORITIES IN THE FUTURE OF NURSING

In the future, the nursing profession must integrate resilience, innovation, and advocacy to address the evolving requirements of healthcare systems.

Key insights and discussion points:

- Create safe environments and prioritize well-being to combat burnout and attrition.
- Develop orientation and residency programs to strengthen novice-to-expert transition.

- Integrate artificial intelligence and digital health tools to improve decision-making and efficiency.
- Expand mentorship and succession planning to sustain leadership pipelines.
- Address systemic inequities such as maternal and infant mortality disparities.
- Increase nursing representation in global, national, and local policy forums.

Findings from the Nursing PIER 2025 Panel Discussion highlight the urgent need for the nursing profession to adapt to changing healthcare conditions while upholding its core values of humanity, trust, and evidence-based care. Across the domains examined, a consistent theme is evident: nurses serve as essential change agents, but systemic barriers, including inequities, workforce shortages, and limited leadership representation, jeopardize the sustainability of the profession.

Access to high-quality care is deeply connected to how nurses are educated and empowered, and overall engagement (3). Panelists emphasized that advanced practice nurses and nurse-led initiatives play a crucial role in addressing systemic gaps, particularly during times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. This is consistent with national calls for expanded scope of practice and advanced practice preparation to improve equity and patient outcomes (4). To sustain this progress, nursing education must continue to evolve through accelerated pathways, simulation-based training, and residency programs that ensure new graduates can successfully transition from novice to expert.

The discussion further underscored the importance of robust workforce data not only as a descriptive tool but as a lever for advocacy. Metrics that measure retention, well-being, and diversity are essential for justifying investment and reframing nursing as a value driver rather than a cost center. Without transparent and actionable data, efforts to align policy and workforce realities will remain fragmented and ineffective. Nationally, this aligns with the recommendations of The Future of Nursing 2020–2030 Report, which emphasizes that a data-driven approach is essential for achieving equity in care delivery (2).

Leadership development was also identified as a critical priority. Nurse leaders must cultivate financial fluency and political acumen to influence beyond the bedside and into boardrooms, legislative halls, and global policy arenas. The panelists highlighted the potential of hybrid leadership models, which combine clinical and administrative responsibilities, to support nurses transitioning into leadership roles. Mentorship, both formal and informal, was described as a vital pathway for cultivating the next generation of leaders and ensuring continuity in professional advocacy.

Although the data source for this analysis was derived from a local and regional panel, the themes and recommendations generated have broad relevance and potential for application

at multiple levels. The issues raised by the panel – workforce resilience, equitable access, leadership preparation, and innovation – mirror national and even global challenges, suggesting that the insights presented here extend beyond the immediate region and can inform nursing policy and practice across diverse healthcare contexts.

Looking forward, the panel emphasized that while technological disruption – including artificial intelligence and digital health tools – presents new opportunities for improving efficiency and decision-making, nursing must embrace innovation without losing sight of its humanistic foundation. Resilience, well-being, and a safe workplace environment are prerequisites to retaining nurses and enabling them to thrive in increasingly complex systems (5). At the same time, systemic inequities such as high maternal and infant mortality among marginalized populations demand continued advocacy and bold action from nurses in all settings.

The implications for practice, education, and policy are clear. Healthcare organizations must strengthen academic-practice partnerships and invest in workforce resilience. Nursing education programs must integrate leadership, finance, and technology into curricula while fostering interprofessional collaboration. Policymakers must ensure that nurses are represented in decision-making bodies and that workforce data informs equitable policy. Ultimately, the future of nursing rests not only on addressing workforce shortages but on reimagining the profession as a central driver of equity, innovation, and health system transformation. By aligning access, education, leadership, workforce planning, and future priorities, nursing can fully realize its potential as both the heart and the backbone of healthcare.

CONCLUSION

The future of nursing depends on the strategic integration of access, education, leadership, workforce planning, and innovation. Nurse leaders emphasize the importance of maintaining a foundation in humanity and equity while adopting new emerging technologies and leadership roles. To advance the profession, this paper recommends expanding access to high-quality, evidence-based care; evolving nursing education through innovative models, simulation, and interdisciplinary partnerships; developing leadership capacity and mentorship to enhance nurse influence in policy and operations; collecting comprehensive workforce data to inform equity and decision-making; and prioritizing innovation and advocacy to address future healthcare needs. Academic institutions, healthcare systems, and policymakers must act decisively to empower nurses in transforming healthcare for future generations.

This paper contributes new knowledge by systematically capturing and analyzing the perspectives of the invited panelists. While previous scholarship has underscored the

importance of collaboration and innovation in nursing, this work is unique in grounding its position statement in real-time, practice-informed dialogue across academic, clinical, and leadership contexts. The synthesis of panel proceedings and field notes highlights workforce sustainability, equity in care, and innovation as interrelated imperatives that must guide the future of nursing.

The significance of this contribution lies in its ability to translate lived experiences and strategic insights into actionable priorities for education, practice, research, and policy. By integrating diverse voices, it provides a forward-looking framework to inform decision-making and advocacy within the profession. In doing so, the paper not only records the outcomes of the Nursing PIER Conference but also offers a roadmap for aligning nursing leadership, education, and health system transformation toward a more equitable and sustainable future.

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