

110 Years of the Wyoming State Board of Nursing

Marcia L. Dale, RN, Ed,D, FAAN

The first meeting of the Wyoming State Nurses Examination Board was held in Cheyenne, December 7, 1909. The meeting followed the passing of the law in February, 1909, when the 10th Legislature of the State of Wyoming established an Act to “provide and regulate the examination and registration of nurses and the practice of nursing.” The Act mandated that the Wyoming Nurses Association (established in 1908) should nominate five members as candidates. The governor then appointed a board of three examiners from the list of candidates.... Three nurses, Miss Sarah Jane McKenzie, Cheyenne; Mrs. Jas. E. Mills, Rock Springs; and Mrs. Amy E. Miller of Sheridan were present. Miss McKenzie was elected president. Each board member was paid expenses and \$5.00 a day for attending a board meeting. The money came from the “Nurses’ Fund” that was derived from fees received by the Board of Examiners for administering examinations. A register of all nurses by name and address was to be maintained.

The Board’s other main function was to adopt rules establishing uniform and reasonable standard of instruction and training for all training schools. Examinations were to be held once a year. A certificate was issued to all applicants who successfully passed the exam. An applicant had to be 21 years old, of good moral character, and possess any other qualifications established by the Board. An applicant had to pay \$10 to take the exam.

Nurses who had graduated from a training school connected to a general hospital with at least two years’ training prior to July 1, 1910, were exempt from having to take an exam. Those nurses who had completed one year training program prior to January 1,

1897 and had five years' experience were also exempt. If a student was in a program at the time of the passage of the Act and graduated, they, too, did not have to take the exam.

The Act stated that it would be unlawful to practice as a registered nurse without a certificate from the Board; however, no attempt was made to enforce this law.

Reciprocity was given to nurses who had been registered in another state and whose training requirements were equivalent to those of Wyoming.

At the first meeting, the new Board members designed the record books for keeping minutes, stationery, the seal of the board, and expense vouchers. The name of "Wyoming State Board of Nurse Examiners" was chosen. It was decided to contact the Colorado Board of Nursing to find out the standards Colorado used for the size of training schools. On the second day of the first meeting, it was reported by the secretary that Colorado considered thoroughness of the training, length of courses, and the superintendent as more important than the number of beds in the hospital. Each training school in Wyoming was to be contacted for a report of their work, number of students, size and branches of studies. The board then decided that the following curriculum was necessary to bring a training school to the expected standard: practice of nursing, anatomy and physiology, hygiene, dietetics, surgery, gynecology, bacteriology, obstetrics, contagious diseases, and material medica (the study of drugs and other substances used in medicine, uses, and preparation of drugs). A score of at least 75% was required to pass all courses. Male nurses could substitute genitourinary examination for gynecology and obstetrics. The hospital associated with the training school could have no fewer than 15 beds.

Later on in the first meeting, applicants were voted on and certificates issued to Amy E. Miller, Sheridan; Sarah Jane McKenzie, Cheyenne; J.E. Mills, Cheyenne and an additional 29 applicants. The new board decided to deny two applicants and pending an investigation.

At the second meeting held on June 22, 1910, one of the nurses who had been investigated had to take the exam and was given a certificate. The other nurse was given a certificate. The schools that had reported were the Wyoming General Hospital, Rock Springs; St. Johns Training School, Cheyenne; Branch of Wyoming General, Sheridan; and Cheyenne Private Hospital Training School. All of the schools were instructed to add dietetics in order to qualify for registration.

Examination questions were written by board members. The exam was given in June and December in each town where a board member lived. The exam papers were mailed to each board member for marking and approval. The Board voted to notify all nurses that they needed to register.

On June 3, 1913, it was noted that nurses were practicing without being registered. These nurses were to be notified that they must make application or that penalty of the law was to be enforced. It was noted that the enactment of the law for registration of nurses resulted in great improvement in nursing conditions in Wyoming. Training schools were giving better instruction; nurses were accepting higher standards, and the law was keeping out members of the "irresponsible class," who were unable to register in other states.

New rules and regulations were discussed on June 3, 1913 and all previous rules were repealed. However, the Secretary of State did not accept the new rules. At the June

11, 1914 meeting, discussion was held on nullifying certificates of those who were not maintaining professional standing from a “moral” standpoint.

The length of training was increased to three years in July, 1919. At that time, the schools were Lincoln County Miners Hospital Training School, Kemmerer; Ivinson Memorial Hospital, Laramie; St Johns Hospital training School, Cheyenne; Cheyenne Private Hospital Training School, Wheatland Private Hospital, Wheatland; Wyoming General Hospital Training School, Rock Springs; and Branch Wyoming General Hospital Training School, Sheridan. Each school was required to submit an annual report.

In June, 1923 the Board passed a rule that the secretary would be paid \$15 a month salary to help cover the expense of a room, heat, and light for an office in her home. The Attorney General was consulted in December, 1923 to determine how much time a nurse would be allowed to practice before registering. The interpretation of the law was that no time was allowed. The “Board decided again to use force and more strategic measures” to enforce the law.

Highlights of later years:

1924-motion was made to purchase a typewriter.

1926-Discussed the decision to hire a part-time secretary and training school inspector. A bill was submitted to the Legislature asking for an appropriation.

1927-All exams were to be given by board members and were to include written questions, oral questions, and two demonstrations. Students were not to live in the basement nor the attic of hospitals and were not to sleep in double beds.

1929-A bill passed to allow the Board to have an educational director for schools of nursing. Recommendation made that schools were to arrange a three month affiliate

for pediatrics, and three months for public health at the Wyoming Tuberculosis Sanatorium in Basin, Wyoming.

1931-A national curriculum was put out by the National League for Nursing Education (NLNEd). Small registration cards were to be issued in conjunction with certificates.

1932-Iverson Training School was discontinued.

1933-The minimum age to start a training school was raised to 20.

1935-Pre-nursing curriculum was offered at the University of Wyoming that would be sufficient to meet the requirements of any school in the state. Rock Springs Training School was discontinued with the stipulation that the school would re-open with an educational director who had special preparation in teaching and who had earned a college degree. The secretary reported that “a total of 166 new nurses had been registered since June, 1935. I believe at the present time all are employed at least part-time. With the eight hour duty more nurses are required and for this reason it does not seem that we have an over supply.”

Wyoming had one of the best drafted Nurse Practice Acts in the United States. The Board was empowered to draft rulings in spite of ever-changing laws in other states preventing the necessity of going before the Legislature.

1937-Four years of high school education were required for admission to a training school. Psychiatry was made an elective course, as the NLNEd did not make it compulsory. Students had to be 19 years of age for entrance into a training school. Four types of questions were asked for the certifying exam: completion, matching, true and

false, and single and multiple choice. There were 100 questions on each subject.

Graduates had to be 21 years of age to take the exam and pay \$10.

1940-National accreditation of schools was established. A delegation from Sheridan introduced a bill to put nursing under the medical association because they didn't like the recommendations made to improve their school in Sheridan. Sheridan paid a stipend to get students.

1944- Rock Springs school of nursing was admitted to the United States Cadet Corps. The law requiring registration still was not being enforced.

1947-Age limit for nurses was lowered to 18. The national pool test was used for exam questions.

1955- A new nursing practice act was enacted by the 33rd Legislature. The name of the board was changed to Wyoming State Board of Nursing. The qualifications of board members were changed and the powers of the board were changed. Board members must be United States citizens, Wyoming residents, registered in Wyoming, have the specified level of education and experience. The board was empowered to accredit nursing education programs.

From *Highlights of the Wyoming Nurses' Association's First Half Century*" by Dr. T. A. Larson, the statement is made that "finally, in 1955 mandatory licensure for the professional nurse was adopted, not without a struggle, but we note in the 1958 convention minutes the statement: 'discussion concerning persons who are not registered nurses but who admit they are practicing to some extent' " (Larson, 1959).

1967 – Standards for educational programs were written. Pat Scarse, BSN, MS became the administrative assistant. She left this position in 1969 so the board member

in Cheyenne carried the load of work. Test questions were still being reviewed by the board.

1970 –The National League for Nursing said that a self-study had to be written based on internalization because “a theory is basis for improvement rather than someone from outside making a diagnosis and suggesting treatment.”

1973- Dorothy Randell, MN became the administrative assistant.

1975-The WSNB consisted of three registered nurses and two licensed practical nurses.

1976-77-Two licensed practical nurses joined the board.

1979-Schools were having difficulty hiring qualified faculty and finding adequate clinical facilities.

1982- Joan Bouchard was employed as an assistant Executive Director.

1983-An additional registered nurse was added to the board and a representative of the public was added for a total of seven members.

1991-1998 Toma Nisbet held the position of Executive Director.

1998-2007 Cheryl Koski held position of Executive Director.

2007-2012 Mary Kay Goetter held position of Executive Director.

2012-present Cynthia LaBonde holds position of Executive Director.

The staff positions have expanded in scope of duties as the as the accountabilities of the board have grown. Currently, the staff is made up of the Executive Director, Assistant Executive Director/Practice & Education Consultant; Compliance and Discipline/Nurse Monitoring Program Manager, Fiscal and Administrative Services

Coordinator, Practice and Education Support Specialist, Licensing Manager, two Licensing Specialists, Legal Assistant and Investigative Assistant.

And so, we come to 2019 and consider the current activities of the WSBN. The board is still licensing registered and practical nurses and certifying nursing assistants. Site visits are made to all the schools of nursing in the state, and the board reviews the annual reports which are submitted by each nursing education program. Applications and renewals for all 15,000 licensees and certificate holders are reviewed and processed, complaints about practicing nurses are investigated, hearings are held as necessary, conditional licensees are monitored; in short, the WSBN strives to “promote public safety through governance of nursing education and practice.”

References

- Donahue, J. (Editor). (1990). *Wyoming Blue Book 50th Legislative Edition, 1990*. Guide to the State Government and Municipal Arches of Wyoming, Volume V, Part II, Wyoming State Archives, Department of Commerce, 1001, p. 533.
- Larson, T.A. (1959). *Highlights of the Wyoming Nurses' Association First Half Century*. Wyoming: University of Wyoming.
- Minutes of the Wyoming State Nurses Examination Board meetings. (1909 – 1978).