Debating the Doctorate

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pg. 9

After telling myself for years that I was too old, didn't have the money, and didn't have the time to return to school, 20 months ago I began pursuing a doctorate in nursing science (DNSc). This educational endeavor has added to my perspective on advanced practice nurses (APNs) and doctorate-level education.

Loretta Ford, PhD, the cofounder of the NP profession, stated three reasons for APNs to receive doctorate degrees: (1) the increase in evidence-based practice, (2) the need for nursing to be seen as a profession rather than an occupation, and (3) the need for leadership. I agree with Dr. Ford's points and can add a few:

- The medical profession challenges itself to base practice on evidence. Physicians shelve interventions that are traditional but unnecessary or ineffective. Similarly, NPs must insist on practicing evidence-based nursing. Doctorate-level education can help us obtain our evidence-based goals through conducting and evaluating clinical research.
- Although patients do not critically scrutinize our degrees, they often assume that we have doctorate degrees. Patients have addressed me as "Doctor Pearson, my NP." Consumers hold NPs in high regard; a validating degree can only add to this respect.
- Some physician groups lobby for legislative dominance over APNs. Although physician groups claim nursing profession and helps avoid the criticism that an APN is nothing more than a physician "wanna-be."
- With today's nursing shortage, nursing schools struggle to attract the brightest candidates. Young, talented individuals must see nursing as a profession with leadership positions based on education, experience, and

Some physician groups lobby for legislative dominance over APNs. Although physician groups claim patient welfare as their motive, their true motive — economics — becomes obvious when doctorally prepared NPs debate health policy beside doctorally prepared MDs.