Executive Summary

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Executive Nurse Fellows

The **RWJF Executive Nurse Fellows** program is a three-year, advanced leadership program designed to address the needs, opportunities, and challenges of registered nurses (RNs) in senior leadership roles. Through coaching, education, group training, and individual initiatives, the fellowship builds capacity among nurses to help transform health care at the local and national levels. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s Board of Trustees has authorized up to $41.2 million for the program, which began in June 1997, with the first cohort enrolled in 1998. More than 300 nurse fellows will have received training through 2017; RWJF will close the program in 2018 after the 2014 cohort has completed their fellowship period.

**Context**

Registered nurses (RNs)—numbering approximately 2.7 million—are the nation's largest group of health care professionals. The clinical backbone of the health care delivery system, nurses bring a unique skill set to executive roles that makes them ideal candidates to assume senior leadership positions in health care organizations, academia, public health, and government.

However, many nurse executives lack the advanced leadership training, executive coaching, and networking opportunities needed to move them to senior levels of leadership and meet the challenges of the 21st-century health care system.

Read the full report. Learn more about the program here.
The Program

Each year, RWJF selects up to 20 highly qualified RNs as *RWJF Executive Nurse Fellows*. Fellows receive $35,000 in leadership development funds during their participation. The fellows continue to work in their current positions during their fellowships but are guaranteed time off to participate in program activities.

The program offers a mix of individual and team activities—with the fellows participating in an assessment of their strengths and weaknesses as leaders and collaborating with program staff to develop tailored learning plans. The program was significantly overhauled in 2010, with a new leadership curriculum that focuses on developing competencies in four core areas: leading self, leading others, leading the organization, and leading in health and health care.

Major components of the program include:

- Advanced leadership training through face-to-face sessions, webinars, and assigned reading
- Team-based “Action Learning” projects, where groups work together to understand, develop, and apply advanced leadership concepts and skills
- Executive coaching from program faculty and outside experts with senior-level leadership experience (formerly a mentorship component)
- Self-directed learning and individual projects designed to improve health care in their home communities
- Continuing leadership development through an alumni network

The final cohort of 20 fellows will enter the program in September 2014. As part of a broad reorganization of its work, RWJF plans to close the *RWJF Executive Nurse Fellows* in 2018, once those fellows complete the program.

The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) in Greensboro, N.C., in partnership with the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill School of Nursing, has managed the program since April 2010. The Center for the Health Professions at the University of California, San Francisco, served as the first program office, from 1997 until 2010.

**Key Results**

- **Since accepting its first cohort in 1998, the two national program offices have supported 285 fellows participating in 15 three-year cohorts, of which 281 completed their fellowships. The 20 fellows selected in May 2014, are the final cohort.** RWJF program staff and program leadership believe that the *RWJF Executive Nurse Fellows* is the flagship leadership development program for senior-level nurses from all sectors of health and health care in the United States.
• **Under the Center for the Health Professions, fellows conducted individual leadership projects at their employing institution. Among the projects:**
  
  — An administrator in a New York City hospital developed a program to increase access to care for elderly people with asthma in East Harlem.
  
  — An employee of the Georgia government worked on a comprehensive plan to address women's health needs across the state.
  
  — An official of an Arizona hospital association undertook a five-year campaign aimed at easing the state's nursing shortage.

• **Under the Center for Creative Leadership, fellows undertake an individual leadership project designed to improve health, health care delivery, or nursing professional development, locally, regionally, or nationally. Among the projects:**
  
  — Preparing nurse leaders to better educate advanced practice nurses, whose roles are changing as the health care system evolves
  
  — Designing and implementing a global health initiative at the University of Louisville School of Medicine to improve access to health care among refugees
  
  — Improving access to child and adolescent mental health and substance abuse treatment in the St. Louis region

• **Under the Center for Creative Leadership, fellows have participated in Action Learning team projects, such as these:**
  
  — Assessment of the current roles of RNs in primary health care and recommendations to professional organization leaders for 21st century nursing education, policy, and practice
  
  — Development of presentations, a website, and educational materials to identify and prevent bullying in places where nurses work

• **Numerous executive nurse fellows and alumni were promoted or appointed to advanced positions in government, academia, and professional organizations; published papers; and received honors.**

• **Fellows reported a greater understanding of how to lead themselves, others, organizations, and health care after being a part of the RWJF Executive Nurse Fellows program, according to an evaluation conducted by Dinkin & Associates, a global health leadership consulting firm in North Carolina.** They also reported higher levels of confidence in their abilities to be effective leaders within their organizations, the health professions, and/or the national health care system.
The Final Years

In February 2014, RWJF announced that it would develop new programs designed to increase the number of scholars, fellows, and leaders it supports annually, with a continued commitment to including nurses in all the new human capital programs. The realignment means that RWJF will close *RWJF Executive Nurse Fellows* in 2018, along with other programs.

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**Program Management**

National Program Office: Center for Creative Leadership

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