

Nurses protest changes

By MIKE CONLEY
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The licensed practical nurse may be a thing of the past if the recommendations of the North Carolina Nurses Association are passed by the state legislature and the N.C. Board of Nursing.

That's the opinion of David Kesterson, who spoke at a meeting of the local N.C. Licensed Practical Nurses Association at Western Piedmont Community College on Thursday.

Kesterson is the executive director of the National Federation of Licensed Practical Nurses Association headquartered in Raleigh.

About 25 licensed practical nurses attended the meeting to voice their concerns over the proposed changes brought forth by the Nurses' Roundtable, a task force of the N.C. Nurses Association which represents only registered nurses.

One recommendation calls for the titles "licensed practical nurse" and "registered nurse" be changed to "technical nurse" and "professional nurse," respectively in order to provide qualified personnel for the positions.

The change would mean a licensed practical nurse, who currently undergoes 12 months of training, would have to have two years of training to qualify for technical nurse status.

If the proposal is passed, many of the state's 19,000 LPNs would have to go back to school in order to be licensed nurses.

"I don't think we should be relicensed again," said Ruth Whisenant, a licensed practical nurse, speaking for many in the group.

The change would not apply to

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registered nurses who only have to be "grandfathered up" into professional nurse status, or as Kesterson explains it, they would only have to exchange one license for another.

But a person who is "grandfathered up" may not be considered as qualified as new nurse and may not be hired, Kesterson added.

A second recommendation suggests that those who enter as technical nurses hold an associate two-year degree. This would eliminate the current one-year program.

In North Carolina, the LPNs operate under a scope of practice under the RN, Kesterson said. Only one

state, North Dakota, has operated under the proposed guidelines, thus far.

"Some think that it is successful and some think it is not successful. It depends on who you ask," Kesterson said.

"My concern is if this is passed, who would take care of the patients?" asked Ruby McClain, a nurse from Broughton Hospital.

Many of those in attendance voiced the same concern because with LPNs going back to school to learn how to be nurses all over again, there will be a void left in the nursing profession — which is already experiencing shortages.

"I don't believe a lot of the registered nurses would want to handle the kinds of jobs we do," said Jill McFadden, a member of the local LPN Association. Other nurses at the meeting expressed their dissatisfaction with being regarded as "not a real nurse."

The controversy is a national one, Kesterson said, and is one that will not go away.

"People have been asked to do things that are not included in their education," Kesterson said. "There are a whole lot of answers to this problem. This is one of them."

He advised the members to get involved. "The numbers are on your side."

Each year in the U.S., about 42,000 LPNs and 45,000 associate degree educated nurses enter the profession, while only 25,000 bachelor degree educated nurses come in.

"Think of how many are coming in as LPNs," Kesterson said.

Regarding the guidelines proposed by the Nurses Association, Kesterson said, "What you have here are assumptions of a group and what they want."

"You have just as much right to make assumptions, to make guidelines, and to make plans," he said.

"If you don't get involved, you'll end up riding the coattails of someone like this," Kesterson added.

He further advised the licensed practical nurses to write state legislators who will vote on the issue probably in 1991 or 1992.

The next meeting of the local N.C. Licensed Practical Nurse Association will be held Wednesday, April 4, at Western Carolina Center.