

**Title of policy/position statement:**

Supporting universal access to affordable, quality health care

**Issue being addressed:**

Honor Society of Nursing, Sigma Theta Tau International support for efforts to ensure access to equitable, affordable, quality health care services across the world.

**Background of issue:**

More than thirty years ago, the World Health Organization (1978), declaring its goal of achieving health for all, noted that “[t]he existing gross inequality in the health status of the people particularly between developed and developing countries as well as within countries is politically, socially and economically unacceptable and is, therefore, of common concern to all countries.”

Today, health care services remain inaccessible to vast numbers of people throughout the world. Health systems in many developing countries lack the resources and infrastructure needed to assure universal access to even basic health care services. Although most developed countries have well established systems to ensure health care coverage for its residents, many face obstacles to access to health care services as a result of geographic distance or barriers, maldistribution of health care resources and a growing burden of personal, out-of-pocket health expenditures. Moreover, most face rising health care expenditures, aging populations, a growing prevalence of chronic disease, along with a negative economic climate which may exert pressure on some governments to reduce their commitment to strong social protections, including health care.

Furthermore, among the world’s developed countries, the United States stands alone in failing to provide a system of universal health care coverage. An estimated 46 million people in the United States were without health insurance coverage in 2008 (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor and Smith, 2008), a number which is projected to continue growing absent significant policy changes (Gilmer and Kronick, 2009). Efforts to expand health care resources globally, and particularly in developing countries, are undercut by the ongoing failure of one of the world’s wealthiest and most powerful countries to ensure access or coverage for its citizens and residents.

International inequities in health care resources place additional pressures on developing countries. For years, many developed countries have turned to international recruitment to help make up for shortages of health care professionals. Today, such practices pose a threat to the viability of many developing health systems by exacerbating those countries’ shortages and depleting their supplies of health care workers (Brush, 2008; Sigma Theta Tau International, 2005).

**Policy or position developed, recommended, adopted:**

As a global nursing organization committed to advancing the health of the world’s people, the Honor Society of Nursing, Sigma Theta Tau International supports access to equitable, affordable, quality health care services for all people. Accordingly, the honor society supports efforts in countries throughout the world to achieve health system guided by principles of universal health care coverage and access to affordable, high-quality health care services, along

with an increased emphasis on prevention, primary care, coordinated care and reduced health inequities. The honor society also supports developing systems that will address social and environmental determinants of health.

Achieving such goals will require broader use and coverage of services provided by registered nurses, including advanced practice nurses, to provide expanded access to primary and community-based care and to implement new models of more efficient, coordinated care. In addition to roles as health care providers, nurses must be actively involved in health policy development and system design.

The honor society will seek opportunities to collaborate with other organizations at both national and international levels to support efforts that reflect these broad goals. It encourages members, chapters and regions to engage in educational efforts focused on proposals and strategies to achieve these goals. Education and advocacy for health system change offer important opportunities to advance the profession's role in health policy. The honor society can provide a forum for nurses across the world to learn from each other about their respective health systems and about their roles in working for and achieving health policy change.

### **Resources/references**

Brush, B. (2008). Global Nurse Migration Today. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 40(1), 20-25.

DeNavas-Walt, C., Proctor, B.D. and Smith, J. (2008). *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance. Coverage in the United States: 2007*. U.S. Census Bureau. Retrieved February 1, 2009 from <http://www.census.gov/prod/2008pubs/p60-235.pdf> .

Gilmer, T.P. and Kronick, R.G. (2009), Hard Times And Health Insurance: How Many Americans Will Be Uninsured By 2010? *Health Affairs* 28, no. 4 (2009): w573-w577 (published online 28 May 2009; 10.1377/hlthaff.28.4.w573)]

Sigma Theta Tau International (2005). *Position Statement: International Nurse Migration*. Retrieved January 30, 2009 from [http://www.nursingsociety.org/aboutus/Documents/policy\\_migration.doc](http://www.nursingsociety.org/aboutus/Documents/policy_migration.doc)

World Health Organization (1978). *Declaration of Alma-Ata*. Retrieved May 3, 2009 from [http://www.who.int/hpr/NPH/docs/declaration\\_almaata.pdf](http://www.who.int/hpr/NPH/docs/declaration_almaata.pdf)

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