Since 1930, the Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation has been involved in seeding and reinforcing innovations in the education of health professionals with a focus on turning out professionals who have an expanded view of health and wellness. In April 2014, the Foundation convened the conference “Partnering With Patients, Families, and Communities: An Urgent Imperative for Health Care.” Conference recommendations were released this summer.

Those who participated in the meeting included patients, heads of patient advocacy organizations, educators, and organizational leaders, with nurses, nurse educators, and physicians among the participants. Their charge was to provide suggestions for the transformation of education as well as health care practice, in partnership with patients, families, and communities. Confeerees believed that this was the right thing to do and that it will lead to enhanced quality, productivity, and improved operations within the health care system, not to mention better health outcomes for all of us. One conference participant was quoted as saying “what we’re really talking about is turning it [the American health care system] right side up and placing the focus where it should have been all along: on the patients” (Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation, 2014, p. 1).

Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation conferences such as this are typically planned by an invited, diverse group that is representative of the topic or issue. Papers may be commissioned. Presentations, working groups, and discussions follow so that the attendees can come to a broad consensus. Ultimately, recommendations, followed by a final report, are published. One of the significant outcomes of this conference was an agreed-on vision statement that purposefully uses the term partner because conferees agreed that patients, families, and communities should be welcomed as equal partners who work collaboratively with all those concerned with health care. The statement reads:

We envision a future in which individuals, families, and communities are understood to be the very reason our health-care system exists and that those who are caring, teaching, learning, or otherwise working within the system must partner fully and effectively with them to foster optimal health and wellness for all. (Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation, 2014, p. 1)

I am not fond of using the term paradigm shift, but this vision statement seems to require a fundamental change in both practice and the time-honored education of health professionals. The shift should focus on an equal, respectful, and mutually beneficial partnership at all levels. Although the conferees noted many years of continued effort are needed for this paradigm to become part of the culture of health care, the recommended changes should start immediately. The key areas of focus outlined in the conference recommendations are:

1. Make changes in the content and conduct of health professions education necessary to graduate practitioners who partner with patients, families, and communities.
2. Make changes in health professions education organizations and healthcare organizations necessary to facilitate durable partnerships, both new and existing, with patients, families, and communities.
3. Build the capacity for partnerships among patients, families, and communities and health professions education and healthcare organizations.
4. Make regulatory and payment reforms that require, support, and sustain partnerships among patients, families, and communities and health professions education and healthcare organizations. (Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation, 2014, p. 4)
I am struck by how many of the actions recommended for the second key area are pertinent to those of us in nursing professional development and accreditation. The following quotes come directly from the recommendations. They are identified as actions that leaders in the field of health professionals’ education should undertake to move forward in the formation of partnerships:

- Model at every level of the organization the values and behaviors that welcome patients, families, and communities as partners.
- Create...new mission, vision, and values statements that reflect partnership.
- Communicate values, set expectations, and establish incentives to partner...in substantive ways around the realignment of clinical practice and the education and training of health professionals.
- Develop processes to select members of governing boards and oversight committees who represent the diversity of the community and who understand the shift toward partnership.
- Include community members in the ongoing monitoring and quality improvement processes of the organization’s performance and capabilities, and provide any additional resources needed to attain the goals....
- Work with national organizations and accrediting bodies to promote leadership and governance around the concepts of alignment and partnership, and provide incentives to restructure in fundamental ways to incorporate patients, families, and communities. (Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation, 2014, pp. 7-8)

More detail can be found in the full report, which can be accessed at http://macyfoundation.org/docs/macy_pubs/JMF_ExecSummary_Final_Reference_web.pdf.

I believe that nursing professional development is in a unique position to take the lead. After all, at its core, nursing revolves around the creation of solid relationships...with patients, colleagues, and other health professionals. We practice in a wide variety of clinical and outpatient settings, with families, as case managers and nurse navigators, and in communities. We are there at the beginning of life and at the end. We are good at making connections. What better time to begin?

The value of keeping people healthy, a practice that certainly requires partnerships with individuals, families, and communities, is becoming even more important—patient-centered medical homes and accountable care organizations are but two examples. Rereading the recommendations has me asking myself questions such as: “What do the principles of partnership mean for our provider unit?” “How do we integrate the tenets of nothing about me without me into our programming?”

As a place for nursing professional development to begin, it would be useful to review and revise our mission statements. Although each education unit will need a champion, we all need to be on board. When activities are planned, we need to consider ways in which the first-hand knowledge of patients, families, and communities can be a resource. As appropriate, patients and family members can join planning committees. They can join us to enhance not only the content, but also the experiences of our learners. The Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation report certainly offers food for thought, and it provides a timely opportunity for us to be on the vanguard of change. Let’s take the lead.

REFERENCE