

October 4, 2021

Paula Meyer, MSN, RN, FRE  
Executive Director  
Nursing Care Quality Assurance Commission  
Town Center 2  
111 Israel Rd S.E.  
Tumwater, WA 98501

*Re: COVID-19 Statement on Misinformation*

Dear Ms. Meyer,

On behalf of the Washington State Nurses Association, I am writing regarding the Commission's recent *COVID-19 Statement on Misinformation*.

We were surprised when this statement was introduced and adopted during the NCQAC Business Meeting on September 9, 2021. Communicated as a late addition, the topic was not included on the written agenda or in meeting materials, and non-Commission members were not provided a copy of the statement during the meeting. This minimized the ability of WSNA and other interested parties to review, comment or seek clarification. While we understand that adding late agenda items may be necessary from time to time, we respectfully request that a process be identified to provide meeting guests with access to relevant materials to allow an opportunity to comment before action is taken on such items.

WSNA agrees that nurses have an obligation to provide accurate, evidence-based information regarding health and illness. Of course, this applies to any condition, not just COVID-19. We also recognize that "granting exemptions to vaccination or masks that are not based in established science or verifiable fact" is inappropriate and may lead to investigation and possible disciplinary action. But the same is true for any practice that is not based on science of fact.

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The Uniform Disciplinary Act (RCW 18.204.150) already provides a basis to address unprofessional practice. Thus, we do not understand why this NCQAC statement was considered necessary. Moreover, the Commission's statement does not provide clear thresholds for opening a complaint investigation or sanctions. While the statement may be intended to address acts of deception or providing treatment or recommendations that run counter to science or fact, such as unproven and potentially harmful "cures," the language is far broader than this.

As we know you agree, nursing as a profession has distinguished itself in providing expert, compassionate care to the public under unprecedented and challenging circumstances. Nurses have served as trusted ambassadors of preventive measures such as masking and vaccination. Those nurses who may do otherwise—who deliberately provide false, harmful information about COVID-19, masking or vaccination, or those who provide exemptions with no basis in science or fact—are outliers. Existing law and policy provide a basis for investigating and taking action against any nurse who engages in harmful practice regarding any health condition. The NCQAC's statement is not only unnecessary; it paints with such a broad brush that many nurses may worry about whether simply raising questions or voicing concerns will lead to disciplinary action.

We realize that the October 19 NCQAC Disciplinary Subcommittee meeting will discuss criteria for investigating COVID-19-related complaints, to be considered at the November 12 NCQAC meeting. While we hope that this will result in narrowing the broad reach of the NCQAC statement, that statement has already been adopted, is posted on the NCQAC website and continues to circulate as is.

Thank you for considering our concerns. As always, we look forward to continued collaboration with the Commission in protecting the health of the people of our state.

Sincerely,



David M. Keepnews, PhD, JD, RN, FAAN  
Executive Director