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NCSBN ID: The One True Unique Nurse Identifier Transcript ©2024 National Council of State Boards of Nursing, Inc.

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Presenter
NCSBN

♪ [music] ♪ - [Jason] Welcome, everyone. Thank you for joining us for a discussion on the NCSBN ID, the one true unique nurse identifier for every nurse. There's been a lot of buzz over the last few years in the data world around the NCSBN ID. So, today, we're talking to four experts who will help us understand its value and importance to healthcare. It's wonderful to have all of you here.

Thank you for joining us. Dr. Nancy Beale is president of Telemetrix, co-chair of the Alliance for Nursing Informatics, and like our other panelists as well, a member of the Nursing Knowledge & Big Data Science Policy and Advocacy Workgroup. Dr. Susan Alexander is a professor in the College of Nursing at the University of Alabama at Huntsville. Whende Carroll is a clinical informatics expert, transforming healthcare through the use of data and technology.

And finally, Nur Rajwany is the chief information officer here at the National Council of State Boards of Nursing. And let's get started right away, first, by hearing a little more from each of them in terms of the importance of data to their roles. Nancy, I'm going to start with you.

- [Dr. Beale] Thank you so much. I would say data is really the future, as we talk about more and more systems that have come in to healthcare, and how data is transferred from one system to another, or otherwise known as interoperability. And without solid data that is equal across systems, interoperability becomes very complicated, and, in some cases, impossible.

In my role, I lead systems, digital health systems, and so ensuring that data that transfers from one system to another really makes it meaningful.

- Susan, how about you? Tell us a little bit more about yourself, and the role of data in your work.

- [Dr. Alexander] Sure. So I'm a professor in the College of Nursing at the University of Alabama in Huntsville. And I'm on the graduate side of the program. And so it's really important to us to be able to get accurate data about our applicants and our students to be able to track their outcomes in our program from an educational perspective, and then help launch their careers successfully.

So the data point that we use and the data that we capture help us understand how successful we are in our programs to help our students, and to paint a better picture of how their skills and training are improved by getting additional education.

- That's important work. Whende, how about you?

- [Whende] I am the founder of Nurse Evolution, which is an information hub for nurses to learn more about technology, analytics, and innovation concepts, and how they work together. And why I think that's so important and for nurses to know is because we need to forward our visibility, and our abilities, and how we use data, and understand the basics of healthcare technology, and our creativity as well.

I'm also the clinical informatics advisor at HIMSS, where I get to work with a lot of different clinicians. And it's imperative that we raise our voice, and we have more vision, and are more visionaries of the value of nursing. And we can do this through the topic we're going to talk about today.

- Thank you, Whende. Nur, I know you work quite a bit with data. Same question to you.

- [Nur] So, as my role as a CIO at National Council, one of the top priorities that I have is to make sure that the data is secure. Right? Security of data is extremely important, especially in this day and age. The data that comes to the Nursys system from all the boards of nursing, it goes through a lot of touchpoints and a lot of complexities.

And we need to make sure, and that's what we do, the entire journey of this data from point A to point Z, which is at the Nursys system, is secure. This whole path is secure. And then, when it's resting at the NCSBN, it has more security around it. And when you have security, when the data is cleaned, when the data has integrity about it, the business actually has a lot of trust and confidence.

And with that trust and confidence, I believe that business can succeed in what it needs to do.

- So, Nancy, one of the things I know we're going to hear a lot about in this discussion is the concept of a unique nurse identifier. Can you maybe just help us understand what that is and why that's so important in healthcare?

- Yes. A unique nurse identifier is a number that is specific to every licensed nurse throughout, not only the United States but beyond. And that number, by being unique, means that you can trust that as a source of information, and a source of truth across systems.

- I like that. Now, Nur, I know that at NCSBN, we have developed and we're promoting the use of the NCSBN ID. What can you tell us about the NCSBN ID specifically?

- Right. So NCSBN ID is a number that is automatically generated through a complex set of algorithms, and many variations that it goes through, including the data matching, deduplication of the data that happens. That is why it is considered to be a unique identifier.

Now when this NCSBN ID is connected to a nurse, it takes on the identity of a unique nurse identifier. We guarantee that this ID is nationally unique, and in the future, globally unique as well in the nursing world.

- Wow, that's impressive. Now, for a nurse who's interested in finding out their NCSBN ID, or obtaining an NCSBN ID, what do they need to do?

- The nurse has to not do anything to get an NCSBN ID assigned. Why? Because NCSBN ID is assigned automatically to the nurse through the nursing examination process, namely the NCLEX for PN or NCLEX for RN. And also the data that we get from the boards of nursing through that matching process, the ID is automatically assigned to the nurse.

Every single nurse who becomes licensed gets an ID assigned. So from that perspective, the nurse doesn't have to do anything. Now, however, if a nurse would like to find out their ID, very simple, they have to go to the primary source equivalent nursys.com system.

The data in that system is provided by all the boards of nursing. Without them providing the data, this would not be possible. A nurse can look themselves up, and the ID would be right there assigned to them.

- So, Whende, when you hear about the NCSBN ID, what are some of the advantages that strike you?

- The advantages are...I think, about health systems, and I think how they can use all their disparate data sources from different technologies such as enterprise resource planning to the EHR, to remote patient monitoring, and even equipment such as taking vital signs and things like that.

They can aggregate that data together with the NCSBN ID and begin to look at how nurses are performing. Quality improvement for training, and to be able to see who our high performers are at a high level. We can look at it at a macro level.

And we can have the best outcomes for our patients whom are providing them with the best care for those individuals.

- Personally, I appreciate the convenience. I can go to the website, look it up, print anything. Use Quick Confirm. It's my number. It's my number for life. I've added it to a lot of my documents, my professional documents. And then in education, it's just so easy for us to be able to confirm that our students are licensed when they've had a change in licensure from state to state.

We can use the other products that are available on Nursys to be notified that they've become licensed as an advanced practice nurse, or they've gotten licensure in another state. So it really helps us understand better where our graduates are going beyond our program. And then just as Nur said, the security of knowing that, that the information that is coming from the system is accurate, it's updated daily.

We just have no questions about it.

- I would say it also facilitates the interoperability, and also potential for automation of systems across systems. Today, some of the systems that Whende gave as examples from the ERP system to the EHR, to maybe physiologic monitoring system, each of those have a place for the data to live related to a nurse.

Right now, much of that upload of that information is manual. Using a standard like the unique nurse identifier facilitates automation and interoperability between those systems. In addition to that, I would say as someone who also employs nurses, I am able to very easily automate the lookup to ensure where people are licensed across states, or in individual states, and if their license is current, accurate, and valid.

- There's also some buzz that potentially something like an NPI could accomplish the same. Is that something that you've thought about? And if so, how would you compare and contrast to the NCSBN ID?

- I think there are some real key pieces to know about the NPI. One is that it is not unique to nursing. It is used across disciplines, clinical disciplines. So if you're looking to find nurses in the data set, you'll find other interspersed clinicians if you're just using the NPI.

Additionally, it's a voluntary process. You have to apply for an NPI, whereas, as Nur shared earlier, the NCSBN ID is automatically assigned, and everyone already has it. And a piece of infrastructure, the NCSBN ID is really data-centric. Where the NPI was really designed from reimbursement model perspective less than unique nurse-specific identifier.

- Every nurse has an NCSBN ID, not every nurse has an NPI. Does every nurse need an NPI? I'm not going to try to answer that question. If you're involved, if you're an advanced practice nurse, certainly because you'll be involved in reimbursement, and billing, and that is...you have to have an NPI, it's an essential element.

But the numbers and the taxonomy of the name, it's very different. The intent and purpose of the number is very different. It's not an either/or choice. It's whether you need the NPI in your daily work. And how can your work as a nurse best be illustrated? And it really, again, depends on your task, your responsibilities, your educational level. But it's not a choice of either/or.

They're very complementary.

- If we want to move towards doing more research and inquiry about the value of nursing and reimbursement, we want to measure all nurses who have an NCSBN ID, which it's, as we talked about, freely available. There's nothing you have to do to get it. Versus the NPI, which has lower numbers.

So if we want to do that real value inquiry, we need to look at all nurses, because we'll be ahead if we do that.

- I got it, Whende. And Nur, do you know the numbers? In other words, you mentioned to us 100% of U.S. nurses would already have an NCSBN ID. In terms of NPI, do we know what that percentage might be?

- Last time the data was provided to us, it was approximately 2% of the nurses.

- Two percent?

- Yeah. It is not an either/or. NPI is an important identifier, and we need to acknowledge that. But the use of the NPI actually is for a specific use which happens to be for reimbursement for individuals or for entities. NPI can be assigned to a hospital system. It is not limited to individuals for that matter.

So any entity, individuals that needs to be identified uniquely in the CMS database for reimbursement purposes, that's what NPI was designed for. Unique nurse identifier is an identifier that, regardless of the reimbursement, identifies a nurse. As soon as a nurse is licensed, you need to be identified, and that's what NCSBN ID does.

So think about it this way. If it's a nurse record, the top of the header of that nurse record would be the NCSBN ID that will identify the nurse. And in that entire record, all of the data elements that you see, that would be the name of the nurse, the date of birth, the SSN, the license number, or the license numbers. Right?

Can have multiple licenses. Credentialing, all the certifications. And NPI ID is one of those attributes actually. And if the nurse doesn't have an NPI ID, then that attribute is blank, and that's okay. But the NCSBN ID being the identifier of the nurse always needs to be there attached to the nurse, and that is the basic difference.

- That makes a lot of sense. What I want to do now is drill down into specific areas of healthcare, and look at the benefit of the NCSBN ID either today, or possibly thinking about its potential into the future. So I'm going to start in the world of education, or research. And Susan, let me start with you, but I'll invite everyone to chime in as well.

Where do you see the potential of the NCSBN IDs in research or education?

- I think in education, I would emphasize that it's an element of professionalism, and helping pre-licensure nurses understand how this is assigned, that this number follows them. Linking it to competencies, making it seamless between education and practice. And helping...again, the number stays with them regardless of their certification, regardless of their education that they might undertake, it's really the way that they paint their picture of their achievements, and their expertise, and what they have accomplished.

It should be on CV, right? It's that important. It's your number for life. It's always your number. Tie it to ORCID IDs. There are lots and lots of ways to emphasize how unique this number is for a nurse, and how it travels with them across the career.

But it begins with that pre-licensure nurse. So I think there's, like I said, an element of professionalism that really should be tied to this number because it's yours.

- Thank you, Susan. Nancy, did you want to add to that related to education and research?

- Yes. As I think about research, and we're trying to really understand the impact...well, one area of research is really trying to look at the impact of nurses and interventions, perhaps, that nurses do on the outcomes of patients. And to be able to really study that, you need to have an attribute, and significant, consistent across systems, across states number identifier.

I think the unique nurse identifier being the NCSBN ID affords that. I think from a research perspective, there's also a lot of opportunity for the future. For us to understand the trajectory of nursing education, and nursing practice where we have areas of gap.

Say, for example, we need more ICU staff, or perhaps we need more perinatal staff in a certain area to really understand where people are going from their educational path will help us better understand where we need to go back and improve some of our educational processes. Right?

And then forecast what we're going to be needing for the future as we look to what is very well known as a nursing shortage.

- I'm so glad you brought that up, Nancy. That actually ties into where I was going to go with Whende, which is the advantages of the NCSBN ID, or even the potential future uses when it comes to either employers, or the nursing workforce in general.

- I'm a futurist, so this is a very exciting question for me. And I know the discussion has come up for being able to really start a nurse's journey with the NCSBN ID at NCLEX.

Really following the journey of the nurse through academia, through the research that they do, when they change jobs, go to different departments, and have that be electronic, something that they can carry with them, something that's going to have all their education there, but even education modules that they did in another position. But that information that they hold to have it be their own, and have there be a culture shift for employers as you go along.

But to really be able to say, "This is my information tied to my NCSBN ID, and here's everything I've done in my career so far."

- Nancy, is there value in the NCSBN ID just to the general public or consumer as well?

- Absolutely. One of the things related to licensure is just that contract, that being a licensed nurse has with the public, that ensures that you have been educated and credentialed appropriately. Being able to go to the Nursys system, and look up at an individual, or even as a health system to be able to have access to an automated feed that tells me the license is valid, the person has an active credential, and it's not encumbered in any way, shape, or form.

That really solidifies our contract with the public to provide nursing care.

- So if I may dovetail both actually on the comment that Whende mentioned, I picked up the word electronic. And then, Nancy, you just mentioned about license credentials. So to bring the two together, and that is the future, looking at the licenses from a digital verification credentials, not just on paper, but being able to have a digital credential that is verifiable.

A nurse can have that in her or his digital wallet, so to speak. So your unique identifier, and as Susan articulated, "This is my number as a nurse, this is with me." That could be a digital credential that can actually stay with the nurse in her or his wallet. That's the future.

- Thank you, Nur. Now, one of the things I think that almost everybody thinks about now when we think about identification numbers, unfortunately, is fraud or abuses of privacy. How do you see the NCSBN ID as mitigating these sorts of things?

- Well, from a fraud perspective, I'll tell you that how it can help the nurse, for example. I believe one of the panelists mentioned that you can have multiple licenses in different states. So let's say, for example, you have licenses in five different states.

Well, each state, because of their own system, will generate a license number. So you're going to have five different numbers. I mean, nobody remembers their license numbers when it goes above and beyond one, perhaps not even one. But think about it this way. If an identifier like an NCSBN ID, which is connected to the nurse, can automatically assimilate all of those numbers, and lay it out for you in the Nursys system by just looking up that ID.

Now, for a nurse, if the nurse is enrolled in the Nurse e-Notify system that NCSBN provides free of charge to the nurses, if somebody tries to get a license for some reason. Now, there are lots of protection in place by the boards of nursing. They go through a lot of checks and make sure that the individual does not get a license through kind of a fraud, but if somebody tries very hard, and they actually go through identity capture process, or whatever that may be, and if they do get a license in state X, well, if the nurse is connected to Nurse e-Notify, they will get a notification of, "Congratulations that you get a license in state X."

So this nurse can say, "Wait a minute, I did not get a license." All of this connection is done through the NCSBN ID that allows the nurse to keep track of all of their licenses and records based on one ID. And that can help cut down the fraud. I'm also told that CMS is also looking to cut down on fraud from their perspective, because, right now, you can actually have an NPI number, a nurse can get an NPI number, and there is no guarantee that that individual is a nurse because there are no formal checks in place at this point.

So what CMS is attempting to do is when a nurse applies for an NPI, they want to be able to check the Nursys system with the ID, with the NCSBN ID, to make sure that individual is licensed where the nurse is saying they're licensed, and it is not encumbered. So this is a great example of NPI, what it does, but what a unique nurse identifier NCSBN ID does to help cut down on the fraud for NPI as well.

- That's fantastic. And, Nur, just to clarify, in terms of privacy, really with the NCSBN ID, it's just public information to begin with, isn't that right?

- Yeah, that is correct.

- Okay. Well, now, this is going to be fun because, Whende, you mentioned you're a futurist. I'm actually going to have all four of you look into your crystal balls. And give me the next few years ahead for the NCSBN ID in terms of the kinds of things that you think might happen with it. So, Whende, I'll start with you and then we'll give everybody a chance to respond.

- Yeah. Well, I think that where I see things going is there being more education about the differences between the NCSBN ID and the NPI, and really more call to action and advocacy for its use by leaders.

And not only that, we're already seeing by nurses practicing clinically at the bedside, and in non-clinical professional roles. So I see more advocacy, I see more use, and I see a global opportunities for this internationally.

- Nancy, how about you? What's in your crystal ball?

- I think I would tag on to the last comment that Whende made about international opportunities. Again, if we look at the shortage of nurses, it's not uncommon for us to have nurses in the United States who have come from other countries across the globe, whether that is somebody who's coming from India, or the Philippines, or perhaps even Canada.

There's a lot of mobility in our culture. And in some areas, that is a way that they are fulfilling some of the shortage gaps. So being able to have a number that allows us to very quickly reference what type of credential that person has, and whether or not it is active.

I think that is just going to really exponentially help us to assist in what has become a more open and global community. I think the other thing is, because I'm a systems person, I really see more use of this identifier across technologies to really facilitate interoperability, again.

We now have one of the major EHR vendors who has incorporated this into their technology. And so, many health systems across the U.S., and even outside of the U.S., will have access for a place holder to exchange that information across technologies. So I really think it will become just another really important attribute of an individual who's working for a system.

- Thank you, Nancy. Nur, how about in your crystal ball? And do you see international expansion of NCSBN ID, or do we see it as a U.S.-only at the moment?

- Well, I'll echo what Whende and Nancy mentioned about the international aspect of it. But let me just talk about the security piece, because that's how I started the data security. One of the most important things right now is that you do not want your personally identifiable information, which is also known as the PII, out there.

Your date of birth, your SSN. Unfortunately, when data breaches and data hacks happen, that's the first thing that gets publicized out there. But you want to be able to minimize that. Well, what is the best way to minimize it? Just not have it. For example, if a nurse data set, if you can strip out all of the nurses' PII data that identifies a nurse, like date of birth, SSN, or anything else, and replace that with an ID, and that's it.

Now, you can identify the nurse with that ID, and you don't have to have the nurse's PII data in your data set. Now, think about two different hospital systems who are engaged in some kind of a research, and they want to be able to exchange the data set. Well, in the past, folks like me, CIOs, and CISOs, and everybody else says, "No, no, no, you are not going to exchange the nurse data set with the PII data in it."

That's potential data security. Now, the hospital systems can say, "We don't have any PII data. The only thing I have is a unique number which happens to identify the nurse." And this way, researchers all across the country, if they consume the ID for the nurse, can replace the nurse's PII data with the ID, and freely exchange the data for research purposes.

That's what gives security to the data set. That's the first thing. The second part is that our northern neighbor, namely Canada, that is the first country that we have the nursing regulatory boards, member of NCSBN, and we are working with them very diligently to assign a unique nurse identifier.

And that happens to be the same NCSBN ID. We have to make sure that the unique nurse identifier assigned to the nurses in Canada do not have a duplication here in the U.S. So, we are actually thinking globally ahead of time. So, if a nurse in Ontario is assigned a unique nurse identifier NCSBN ID, then the same nurse, if that nurse happens to have a license in Maine, should have the same NCSBN ID.

That is what I believe Nancy mentioned. That is what I believe Whende looked in a crystal ball and mentioned that. Having one ID globally in the nursing world is going to really further a lot of the nursing research, practice, and a lot more.

- Thank you, Nur. So, Susan, I know when Nur mentioned researchers exchanging data sets freely and easily, that's something that in the world of education must mean a lot. What do you see in the future in your crystal ball?

- I would say that we have a real need to be able to, again, know where our nurses go. And we have a duty that underlies what we do as nurses to prevent fraud, to protect the public. But using this number, and having the ability to transfer it across data sets, and from facility to facility, it's highly interoperable.

It helps us also realize the importance of protecting the public, and being able to respond to needs, and to capitalize or maximize our different licensure in different states. You can use the licensure by endorsement. So you can really go where the public has needs in a much more fluid way than we ever could. And to better understand, like I said, how are our nurses moving across the country, and what systems are they working, in what care settings, whether it's telemedicine, or whether it's acute care facilities.

We can just really get an idea of the workforce issues in a way that we never could.

- You've painted, I think, a really exciting future where the NCSBN ID is instrumental to so many different positive changes that we need in healthcare. What do you see as actions that nurse leaders, or the nursing community, or even the public might take to help bring about this future?

- There are, I think, two or three things that can happen. The first thing is with regulatory and law. We need to ensure that with the NCSBN ID, the compact licenses states that we are creating access and equity for practice across the United States, and potentially globally eventually.

Because we are trying to, in the future of nursing, our goals from 2020 to 2030 are to improve equity. So the use of the unique nurse identifier can help us with patient outcomes. We can look at clinician and nursing outcomes, we can look at population health outcomes, and we can also look at those regulatory outcomes as well.

The contribution of nursing is really little known to society. And I think using a unique nurse identifier such as the NCSBN ID gives us a voice, gives us visibility, gives us a way to show our contribution in value-based care to begin to really measure that.

- Susan, how about you? What actions can you see the nursing community taking to bring about a better future with NCSBN ID?

- Be aware that you have this number. I talk to colleagues frequently, and sometimes the reaction is, "Well, I don't think I really need that number." And I say, "Oh, you have it. Let me show you how to find your number and use it, integrate it into your systems, and sign up for e-Notify. It's a great way to track your own licensure across multiple states."

There's just so many different ways that this number can be used to make your practice easier.

- Thank you, Susan. And Nancy, we'll close with you.

- So there are three things that come to mind for me. First and foremost, I think we have some work to do to help leaders understand more information about the unique nurse identifier, and how it can benefit the profession. And the work that leaders can do is to promote knowledge and use of the number throughout the organization, throughout systems and technologies that they're using.

The second thing is we also have not only nurses in practice, but nurses who are in the education process, who, as Susan stated, aren't aware of the fact that they have this number, or they'll be receiving this number.

So we have some basic education and groundwork we can do to help educate the nursing community. And lastly, I would say the use of the unique nurse identifier can help us to really tie to better patient outcomes, and learn more information about nursing overall. And I think those things will contribute to elevating the practice of nursing.

- So it sounds like what I'm hearing is know that you have the NCSBN ID, use it, and encourage others to use it.

- Exactly.

- Okay. Well, I think that's really the perfect thought to close on today. Thanks to all our panelists for their expertise, and all the hard work they've done to promote the importance and value of the NCSBN ID. We learned quite a bit today about the NCSBN ID. We know it's something all nurses already have. It supports interoperability across all data systems. It protects personal information.

It's the only identifier specifically for nurses, and it stays with them throughout their entire career. We've also heard a lot about the many ways the NCSBN ID can support research, improve patient outcomes, and address workforce needs. Finally, you can obtain the NCSBN ID free of charge and immediately through our Nursys website at nursys.com. Thanks to all of our panelists, and thanks to all of you for joining us today.

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