The International Year of the Nurse

As we move to the close of the International Year of the Nurse, I wonder how many of us have reached out to a nurse from another geographic culture to discuss the importance of nursing today. Although more recognition than usual has come to nurses, we still have much to do to help the public, our elected officials, and health care leaders appreciate the breadth and depth of the role of the nurse.

We work in all types of settings and with individuals with various backgrounds, socioeconomic status, ages, ethnicities, cultural perspectives, and health status. The term “24/7” represents us well. Even if we are not working in a health care organization that operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, we are likely to be “on” as nurses. As members of communities, we often are the ones our children, parents, or neighbors seek out to have what I call “by the way” conversations. You know, you are shopping in a grocery store and see a friend who shortly says, “By the way, I was wondering . . . .” This leads to a consultation when we are not at work, but yet, we are working.

Nursing is the most trusted profession. How is it, then, that we are seldom cited as the experts on some aspect of care or health? I think this is due, in part, to the fact that often our answers are the commonsense ones—those that are often uncommonly mentioned. They also have no media appeal because there is no drama to events such as washing hands. Yet, that example brings us back to the reason we call ourselves nurses. Florence Nightingale would have made headlines today with her dramatic turnaround of the infection rates and the mortality statistics that she could show related to a simple procedure: washing your hands. She changed how people thought of nurses. Here we are, many decades later, celebrating the International Year of the Nurse. We are a powerful force. We have the opportunity daily to change lives. We need to help others understand what a valuable international resource we are.

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