Sustainability is key to any endeavor. Many of us can succeed at something once. To succeed many times is desired, and to do so sequentially is even more impressive. Sustainable, according to Merriam-Webster’s Online Dictionary (n.d.), means “of, relating to, or being a method of harvesting or using a resource so that the resource is not depleted or permanently damaged.” Granted, that is the second definition provided (the preferred definition was “capable of being sustained”) and it most commonly refers to agriculture. But think for a minute what that means in terms of nursing—and the outcome of the most recent Gallup® poll related to honesty and ethics (Riffkin, 2016).

Yes, once again for 15 years in a row (and 2 years prior to 2001), nurses rate as the highest group in terms of honesty and ethical standards. Why have we not used up our reputation yet? How does the public repeatedly rely on us for high standards? What is it we do that allows us to give so much and yet not deplete our reputation—or have it damaged by some outlying case? Perhaps it is because we really do have the values that Americans see as representing the best.

Two other health professionals were rated highly: pharmacists and medical doctors. What is impressive to me, however, is that nurses were rated so much higher than any other group listed. People (N = 1,028) in the Gallup (2016) poll were asked to rate the honesty and ethical standards in various fields. Both cell phone users (60%) and landline users (40%) responded to the survey. The choices were very high/high, average, and very low/low. Nurses rated 84% at very high/high. Then next two groups rated at 67% (pharmacists) and 65% (medical doctors).

Because of this view by the public, nurses have a special obligation to maintain high standards and to exercise our best judgment when interacting with people about health care. We have the numbers (over 3 million RNs in the United States; Health Resources and Services Administration, 2010) and we have the trust. We can each do something to advance the health of the nation in a sustainable manner.

REFERENCES


Patricia S. Yoder-Wise, RN, EdD, NEA-BC, ANEF, FAAN
Editor-in-Chief
psywrn@aol.com

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