2020: International Year of the Nurse and Midwife

The World Health Organization (WHO) designated this year, 2020, as “International Year of the Nurse and the Midwife.” The purpose of the designation is to recognize the contribution of nurses in achieving universal health coverage (WHO, 2019). The year 2020 was selected because it coincides with the 200th anniversary of the birth of the founder of modern nursing, Florence Nightingale. As Nightingale noted, “…observation, ingenuity, and perseverance (and these really constitute the good Nurse), might save more lives than we wot of” (Nightingale, 1969, p. 65). The International Year of the Nurse and Midwife creates a pause to reflect on our past and to reactivate the role of nursing in society and to participate in initiatives to advance the health of populations across the world.

Globally, the Nursing Now campaign was initiated in 2018 and will carry through the end of 2020. This campaign is a collaboration between WHO and the International Council of Nurses, which focuses on five core areas (Nursing Now, n.d.):

- Ensuring that nurses and midwives have a more prominent voice in health policy making.
- Encouraging greater investment in the nursing workforce.
- Advocating for more nurses in leadership positions.
- Encouraging research that helps determine where nurses can have the greatest impact.
- Sharing examples of best nursing practice.

Within the United States, Nursing Now USA was launched on April 9, 2019, as a collaboration of the American Nurses Association, the U.S. Public Health Service Chief Nurse Officer, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Nursing, and the University of Washington School of Nursing. In addition, several local groups across the country have formed to join in the vision that “Nurses Lead America to Health.” The priorities of the Nursing Now USA initiative are aligned with the global campaign and focus on promoting innovation, developing policy, and expanding influence as leaders in care delivery (Douglass, 2019).

The emphasis on nurses taking a leadership role in policy is clear. At the National League for Nursing (NLN) Education Summit in September 2019, George Thibault, President-emeritus of the Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation and winner of the NLN’s President’s Award, provided a keynote address titled, “Humanism in the Health Professions and Society.” He called on nurses and health professionals to be a voice concerning the variety of antihumanistic movements in society that threaten our patients, including gun violence, anti-vaccination campaigns, denial of science, and treatment of immigrants at the southern U.S. border. Thibault (2019) challenged nurses to address, mitigate, and work to reverse antihumanistic policies. He emphasized, “Human interest, values, and dignity must predominate!”

How do we, as nurse educators, respond to the global and national initiatives to advance policy for the health of all? What actions do we take individually and collectively to challenge policies that are not humanistic? As the profession rated most highly on honesty and ethics (Brenan, 2018), how do we capitalize on our influence to effect societal change? In addition, how do we substantively incorporate leadership and policy work into curriculum so that students recognize these activities as the work of nurses? A confluence of factors, such as recognition of the importance of social determinants of health, along with the political realities outlined above seem to be pointing in the direction of nursing returning to its social mission.

One possible solution, raised by Pittman (2019), is to return to the community-based and patient-centered model of nursing created by Lillian Wald at the beginning of the last century. Through consideration of the principles established by the model, four core functions of nursing in society emerge:

- Establishing trust with patients, families, and communities.
- Assessing patients in a comprehensive manner to include more of the social context that affects their health.
- Developing partnerships outside of health care with social and economic organizations to advance health.
- Creating upstream, collective solutions that promote health and address historic power differentials within society.

At your school of nursing, is there institutional recognition of nursing’s social mission? If so, how is it operationalized? Is the social mission recognized in promotion and tenure criteria? What partnerships exist that focus on patients and communities first, and then consider learning opportunities for students? How are your faculty engaged in...
upstream solutions to policies that are not humanistic? Where in the curriculum are learning activities concerning social determinants of health created? Is there a consistent curricular thread, or are concepts concerning a social mis-

2020 is the Year of the Nurse and Midwife. 2020 is the 200th anniversary of Nightingale’s birth. Let’s join together for collective impact and make a difference in health worldwide.

References
Nursing Now. (n.d.) Who we are. Retrieved from https://www.nursingnow.org/who-we-are/

Amy J. Barton, PhD, RN, FAAN
Editor
The author has disclosed no potential conflicts of interest, financial or otherwise.
doi:10.3928/01484834-20191223-01