Frances Hughes
New CEO of the International Council of Nurses (ICN)

Frances Hughes, RN, DNurs, ONZM, FACMHN, FNZCMHN, has been appointed Chief Executive Officer of the International Council of Nurses (ICN), and began her duties February 1, 2016.

This is not just an event to be celebrated on her own, but also cause for all psychiatric nurses to celebrate and honor her. Frances is first and foremost a psychiatric nurse, honing her considerable clinical skills to produce positive changes for patients, families, health care providers, and communities worldwide.

ROLE WITH THE JOURNAL OF PSYCHOSOCIAL NURSING AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES (JPN)

Frances has been an Editorial Board member of JPN for more than 10 years, contributing several guest editorials and major articles. We first met, more than 20 years ago, as participants in the Network for Psychiatric Nurse Researchers (NPNR), a group convening conferences in the United Kingdom. She has always been a forceful and articulate innovator in both clinical and political arenas.

SUPERB CLINICAL INNOVATOR

Frances established, along with her husband, Kevin (also a psychiatric nurse), the Hillcrest Lodge, a community non-governmental organization, which was the first of its kind. There had not been any residential, community facility for individuals with mental illness who were seriously ill and considered a danger to their families, in-patient staff, and even themselves. Hillcrest Lodge, which opened in 2000, changed that situation dramatically. Houses were purchased, staff were trained, and discharge officers were persuaded to allow patients to be transferred to Hillcrest Lodge. Much of the work of psychiatric nurses is persuasion, and Frances accomplished the positive changes of community dwelling for individuals with mental illness by convincing reluctant in-hospital administrators to try this new approach. At first, only men were admitted. Then additional housing units were bought and women joined the residents. Care was provided with no seclusion or restraints. Staff keep everyone safe 24/7, every day of the year. This model has now been replicated in many parts of the world. This is a first-hand report, as I visited Hillcrest Lodge each time I was in New Zealand. Residents came to consider me a welcome and friendly visitor, of whom they could ask questions about how it was “up top.”

INTERNATIONAL ROLES

Frances also served as a facilitator for the World Health Organization (WHO) Pacific Island Mental Health Network (2005-2011). In countries where individuals struggle with literacy, she explained what the WHO guidelines could provide clinically, professionally, and politically. Vulnerable populations were empowered to access care, which formerly had eluded them. Frances taught nurses how to make human rights more than words, and a part of daily professional action.

Frances has held posts as Queensland Australia’s Chief Nurse and Midwifery Officer and, before that, New Zealand’s Chief Nursing Advisor. She was instrumental in projects such as developing nurse practitioner programs, nurse prescribing programs, and telenursing phone services.

The ICN began in 1899, and now represents nurses in 130 countries via their national nursing organizations. In an interview after her appointment, Frances stated: “ICN is an iconic organization and it is just as relevant today as it was 100 years ago” (Nursing Review, 2015, para. 4).

ICN’s countries are among the poorest to the richest in the world. Regarding this, Frances states:
We need to make sure we are responsive to the membership but we also need to expand ICN to be able to influence wider networks, form wider partnerships and be seen as an organization that needs to be at the tables where major healthcare decisions are made around the world. (Nursing Review, 2015, para 5.)

AUTHOR

Frances has influenced nurses with her clear and forceful writing in JPN. In 2009, she pleaded for nurses to provide better care for individuals with disabilities who also have a mental illness (Hughes, 2009). This population is frequently poorly understood or overlooked by health care providers. The editorial included a list of strategies to improve interviewing of these individuals.

In another editorial (Hughes, 2013), Frances reminded us that individuals with mental illness are not the threat to society that many people believe them to be. She points out that violence is not a symptom of mental illness. While acknowledging that public safety is important, she also asks us to examine the part that media plays in portraying escalated risks if policies are in place that erode human rights.

Frances understands that readers want to know “What’s new?” Her pulse is on new ideas and approaches that nurses in many settings will find useful. One example is an article about appreciative inquiry (Hennessy & Hughes, 2014), a tool for conducting interviews in a manner that elicits in-depth, rather than stereotypical, responses. She and her coauthor suggest that inquiry need not be problem-based (Hennessy & Hughes, 2014).

Throughout her career, Frances has written volumes of reports for agencies, institutions, and administrative bodies. As we all know, reports have a habit of being shelved and not used in day-to-day situations of implementing policies and practices. Such is not the case with Frances. Many reports listed on her curriculum vitae were and are being used to make positive changes. For instance, she made policy very practical in “Have Your Say—Influencing Policy in New Zealand” (Hughes, 2007). Lessons contained within those pages are applicable worldwide.

OTHER INTERESTS

Frances has a strong interest in post-disaster management and pastoral care, triggered by being in Manhattan, New York, on a Harkness Fellowship during the 9/11 disaster. This led to her being commissioned by the WHO, with an Australian colleague, to write international guidelines for nurses coping with post-disaster issues. Coincidentally, she was in New Jersey on a Fulbright Scholarship, studying post-disaster lessons, when Hurricane Sandy hit the state.

Frances holds a BA, MA, and Doctorate in Nursing. She was awarded the New Zealand Order of Merit in 2005 for her services to mental health. In 2011, she received a Fulbright Scholarship. In 2013, Massey University, New Zealand, awarded her the Distinguished Alumni Service Award.

WHAT’S NEXT?

I will be in touch with Frances to see what we can expect as “frequent feeds” in the form of web sources and other electronic media approaches. I will try to persuade her to stay on as a member of the JPN Editorial Board, promising to give her fewer potential articles to review, and instead, inviting more opinion and news pieces, as well as editorials.

REFERENCES


