

## #FightingNurseStereotypes Using Social Media

Advocacy work of today uses social media, such as the wildly successful “Show Me Your Stethoscope” campaign (Twitter® hashtag #SMYS and account @SMYSOfficial; access <http://www.smysofficial.com>), which was born from social media and mobilized nurses from around the world in a matter of days, to rally against the show, *The View*, and co-host Joy Behar’s negative and uninformed comments about nursing. There is the Nurses Take DC (Twitter hashtag #NursesTakeDC; access <http://www.nursestakedc.com>) conference and march in Washington, DC, May 4-5, 2017, that will highlight patient safety and appropriate nurse–patient ratios, and the Raise the Voice campaign (American Academy of Nursing, n.d.) that informs the public about nursing solutions to health care system problems.

All of this wonderful policy and advocacy work stemming from and using social media as a vehicle is juxtaposed against the persisting gender stereotypes of nurses as “blonde bombshells.” The “naughty nurse” image recently came into my awareness when a colleague tweeted a picture of hemostats that were being sold in our university bookstore. The image on the package was of a

cartoon character of a thin White woman with long blonde hair, a tiny waist, and large breasts, wearing lots of makeup, a short white dress, a nursing cap, and red high heel shoes. Like the nursing faculty member who initially posted the image, I was appalled that in 2017 at one of the top Colleges of Nursing in the United States, we—the university, bookstore, college—were in essence supporting the objectification, subordination, and disparagement of nurses and nursing. The naughty nurse image was alive and well and in our own backyard being marketed to a variety of health professions students.

I was outraged. My colleague and I were concerned about our nursing students and our profession. We advocated successfully to have the items removed from the shelves, and the bookstore manager promised not to order any more because of the packaging’s disparaging image of nursing.

Like what is done in these days of social media and more public lives, I shared my feelings on Twitter and Facebook®, and I praised the faculty member who highlighted the issue and later the bookstore manager whom responded so favorably. In my Facebook status update, I “tagged” friend and colleague Sandy Summers,

Executive Director of The Truth About Nursing and coauthor of *Saving Lives: Why the Media’s Portrayal of Nursing Puts Us All at Risk* (Summers & Summers, 2015). Within minutes of my initial Facebook post, Ms. Summers had called the university bookstore manager to register a complaint; she had researched the company that produced the product and called the company’s CEO, among other additional actions.

Nurses and allies started calling and e-mailing the company. In an e-mail to Ms. Summers, the CEO agreed not to order more packaging with the cartoon image but would not agree to cease using what was already in stock.

While Ms. Summers was doing her advocacy work, I did some of my own. I learned that the image was named “Nurse Betty,” which was reminiscent of the cartoon sex symbol Betty Boop™. There was the movie of the same name, *Nurse Betty*, a dark comedy of a waitress who woke up in a fugue state after she witnessed her husband being tortured, pretending that she is a nurse (character) in her favorite soap opera (Golin & LaBute, 2000). Although I do not know where the company derived the image, I can see some similarities to Betty Boop.

Regardless, it was not a positive or realistic portrayal of nursing or nurses.

I tweeted the image and “tagged” the various companies and social me-

To be sure, the company and others have a right to use whatever images they like; however, consumers also have a right, and nurses a responsibil-

words, phrases, and images of nurses and nursing. We must educate people about how these stereotypes affect us, our profession, and our patients.

**...Consumers also have a right, and nurses a responsibility, to advocate for better images, and decline to purchase goods from companies that do not support a positive or more realistic view of nurses and nursing.**

dia handles of the CEO that I could find. I asked the CEO to stop using the “naughty nurse/sexy nurse” image. I did so using Twitter, Facebook, and e-mail.

ity, to advocate for better images, and decline to purchase goods from companies that do not support a positive or more realistic view of nurses and nursing. We must confront disparaging

## REFERENCES

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