I just returned from the International Society of Psychiatric–Mental Health Nurses (ISPN) annual conference in Charlotte, North Carolina, and I am filled with joy after spending time with my colleagues whom in everyday parlance are “my people.” From the friends and colleagues whom I have known for more than 20 years, to those whom I have just met, I feel a connection to nurses who work with persons with mental health problems, nurses who study mental health problems, and nurses who teach others to care for persons with mental health problems.

For those of you who could not attend the meeting, there were four powerful keynote addresses and numerous oral and poster presentations. I would like to take this opportunity to share a snapshot from the keynotes at this year’s ISPN conference.

The second keynote address, which was the Susan McCabe Lectureship, was given by Norman Keltner, EdD, CRNP. Although I had not seen Keltner in many years (we worked together teaching prelicensure undergraduate psychiatric–mental health nursing many years ago at the University of Alabama at Birmingham), he has not changed—his use of humor and authentic presentation of self were delightful as he talked through his journey into and beyond psychiatric nursing.

The third keynote address was the Melva Jo Hendrix Lectureship given by my former mentor and dissertation advisor, Sandra Thomas, PhD, RN, FAAN, who talked about her research on women’s anger and ended with hope for the future. Thomas’ talk was beautifully crafted and delivered.

The fourth and closing keynote address was given by Kenya Beard, EdD, AGACNP-BC, NP-C, CNE, ANEF, whose talk was titled, “Diversity: A Poison, Panacea, or Privilege?,” which turned out to be a question with no right answer, other than no and neither. My takeaway from Beard’s informative and engaging talk was that big changes are not possible until we address structural or institutional racism in this country and that we must acknowledge our unconscious biases and have real conversations about race.

The role of professional organizations, especially specialty organizations, is not only in providing forums for learning from these leaders in nursing who gave wonderful keynotes, it is also about learning from each other about the latest trends in psychiatric–mental health nursing. At this recent meeting, I learned about various psychiatric–mental health nursing practice topics, such as use of mobile applications and telehealth, medical cannabis and CBD oil, and polymorphisms and pharmacogenomics. But I have to say, it is the networking and mentoring that was equally, dare I say, more important and enjoyable.

Perhaps mentoring is more figurative to me now because of my new role as Associate Dean for Faculty Development at Johns Hopkins University School of Nursing. Perhaps it is because I’m at the point in my career that I now have more mentees than mentors. Perhaps it is because I’ve been around a while and have many colleagues and friends. Regardless, I currently feel a great appreciation for those whom I’ve met over the years at conferences like ISPN, and those new people whom I have yet to meet.

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