A Profession in Reflection

By Linda A. Allen, MSN, RN

As nurses week 2015 approaches, I think back through the preceding year at the accomplishments nurses have made and am inspired by their commitment to their patients. Nurses are on the forefront of healthcare and have taken on many roles within and outside the hospital setting in order to advocate and ensure quality care.

Each nurse has countless stories of interactions with patients that not only changed their patients' lives, but their own as well. Nurses will never boast about the care they give, they do not complain about not getting a lunch because they put their patients first, nor will they take credit for the many challenges they have overcome to ensure the best care.

As a nurse educator, I also look back and think about all the students I have challenged, admired, and pushed to be the best they can be. There are many. I also think about those students that have challenged me, enlightened me, and have thanked me for my efforts to help them grow both personally and professionally. It takes a strong and dedicated nurse to return to school while working many long shifts and caring for their families. I will also say they are determined; they are focused; and they are smart.

Nurses are coming back to formal education such as RN to BSN programs in record numbers due in part because of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Institute of Medicine's 2010 report The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health which called for all nurses to advance their education to the highest level. Healthcare institutions have also embraced educational growth promoting and supporting nurses to obtain at a minimum, a bachelor degree. Advanced practice nurses are eloquently flooding our communities and embracing the primary care role in hospitals, local clinics, and schools.

Nurses are also seeing the value of a bachelor’s degree and the role it plays in providing quality nursing care by broadening critical thinking skills and evidence-based practices. In addition to the foundational characteristic of caring, nurses must be knowledgeable and competent in all aspects of care including cultural sensitivity, workforce diversity, environmental concerns, genetics and genomics, communication, collaboration with the healthcare team, technology, and global health concerns. They must also be teachers, mediators, negotiators, mentors, advocates and leaders.

Educational institutions, like Keiser University are also working hard to ensure nurses are being educated to the requirements of today's standards by engaging in continuous quality improvement and innovative ideas to meet the needs of nurses and the communities they serve. This must be done in collaboration with nurses and stakeholders who will be on the receiving end of the care provided. As the landscape of health care continues to change, so must the education of nurses in order to meet the needs of those changes. Nurses’ knowledge, attitudes, and skills need to keep up, and better yet, stay one step ahead of those changes.
Florence Nightingale would be proud of today’s nurses and so I am. I am also proud to be a part of a profession that puts the health and safety of all people first and foremost. Thank a nurse this month for they are all around you working hard to protect and promote your health and prevent disease and disability. Nurses are hidden gems in your communities and neighborhoods and I bet you might even find one on your own street.

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