

Nursing Excellence: Rising to the Challenge

by Jayne Willis

In 1870 Florence Nightingale, the mother of modern nursing, said, “It will take 150 years for the world to see the kind of nursing I envision.” She thought differently about saving patients’ lives. Nursing was founded not on the status quo, but on challenging the status quo. She believed nurses were innovators who could think differently when faced with a challenge. Just as Florence Nightingale cared for patients in the Crimean War 150 years ago, nurses today are sacrificing to put others above themselves and to use their skill and compassion to help patients cope with contemporary challenges.

I don’t think we could have ever imagined how this year would unfold, but nurses have risen to the challenge and boldly faced the difficulties, while still pursuing and achieving nursing excellence. I’ve watched with pride as nurses work tirelessly on the front lines of the pandemic, returning day after day with renewed energy and commitment to the work. When the workload was heavy, they pulled together and worked as a team. They innovated and used technology and creativity in new ways to address challenges they faced. When racial unrest shook our nation, nurses at my organization made a statement that they believed in inclusivity and equity for all individuals, and civility in the workplace is the steppingstone for a diverse workplace.

There were so many stories this year of nurses rising to the challenges they faced and helping patients rise to their challenges as well. My favorite story from my organization was about a nurse named Cat. We received a letter from a patient recognizing her. He shared that he was a patient in critical care after overdosing with his girlfriend. Unfortunately, his girlfriend died from the drug overdose. This was not his first overdose and he was distraught and felt hopeless and worthless. The patient wrote that the only reason he pulled through his despair was because his nurse, Cat, believed in him. You see, Cat had her own story. She lost a brother to an overdose and she shared that she wanted to help this patient because she wasn’t able to save her brother. She believed in the patient and spent a lot of time talking to him and encouraging him. She continued to visit him even after he was transferred out of the ICU. The patient shared that he regained his worth because Cat believed in him. He stated that if she could believe he could beat this addiction, then he could believe in himself. He is home and sober now and will never forget the difference that Cat made in his life. In fact, in her honor he named his new pet cat “Nurse”!

I am confident that nurses will continue to rise to the occasions of the future. We will be remembered for our work and we will inspire others to become nurses. We will be grateful that we were supported and appreciated by our organizations and our communities. Our history will be as significant as the one left to us by the lady with the lamp, Florence Nightingale, and we will be remembered for our contributions for years to come.

I am so grateful that my team has persevered and demonstrated such courage and strength. I know they are tired, and I am committed to doing anything in my power to support them. “Thank you” just doesn’t seem like enough but sometimes it’s all they need to hear. And sometimes it just takes someone naming their cat “Nurse” to remind us that we need to “Stay Strong for Us”.



[Jayne Willis](#), DNP, RN, NEA-BC, CENP is Chief Nurse Executive and Vice President at Orlando Health.

[Website](#)