EMPOWERING NURSES IN 2020, THE YEAR OF THE NURSE

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The World Health Organization (WHO) has declared 2020 as the International Year of the Nurse and Midwife.1 In 2020, Nursing Now will conclude its 3-year global campaign to improve health by raising the profile and status of nursing worldwide.2 This year also marks the bicentennial of Florence Nightingale’s birthday on May 12.3 Accompanying these celebrations of nurses’ contributions to health are efforts aimed at empowering nurses, advocating for expanded roles for nurses, and increasing investments in the nursing workforce.

Nurses are essential members of the health care team, and nursing care underpins every aspect of health care. Globally, half of all health care workers are nurses, and in many instances, nurses are the only health care professionals available to communities. WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus recognized this when he said, "Nurses and midwives are the backbone of every health system: in 2020 we’re calling on all countries to invest in nurses and midwives as part of their commitment to health for all.”1

Nursing Now began in 2018 with a focus on 5 core areas: (1) ensuring that nurses and midwives have a more prominent voice in health policy-making; (2) encouraging greater investment in the nursing workforce; (3) recruiting more nurses into leadership positions; (4) conducting research that helps determine where nurses can have the greatest impact; and (5) sharing of best nursing practice.2 As the formal campaign concludes in 2020, progress has been made in each of these areas, but additional work remains to continue to build on the foundation laid by Nursing Now to improve the status of nursing globally.

Nursing has a rich history of independent professional practice built on distinct disciplinary knowledge. Nursing’s scope of practice is rooted in disciplinary education and training. The American Nurses Association (ANA) defines scope of practice for registered nurses and advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs) thusly: “Nursing is the protection, promotion, and optimization of health and abilities; prevention of illness and injury; facilitation of healing; alleviation of suffering through the diagnosis and treatment of human response; and advocacy in the care of individuals, families, groups, communities, and populations.”4 This scope of practice delineates nursing as an autonomous profession with unique contributions to patients’ well-being across health care settings and patient populations.

However, despite the crucial role of nursing in achieving successful patient outcomes, the independent contributions of nursing have been poorly recognized. In Notes on Nursing,5 Florence Nightingale said,

I use the word nursing for want of a better. It has been limited to signify little more than the administration of medicines and the application of poultices. It
Continued advocacy is necessary to ensure that the public’s view of nurses and health care systems’ workflows reflect nursing autonomy.
authors state plainly that strengthening nursing is “partly about increasing the number of nurses, but also crucially about making sure their contribution is properly understood and enabling them to work to their full potential.”

Florence Nightingale challenged her society’s perceptions of what nursing was and was not and opened the door for a new era of nursing. In 2020, as we celebrate Nightingale’s bicentennial and the Year of the Nurse, we must continue to challenge how nurses are perceived and the limits placed on nursing practice. Issues related to full practice authority, appropriate staffing, and healthy work environments remain unresolved. Critical care offers immense opportunity for nurses to excel, and advances in nursing benefit our colleagues, our patients, and the public. The world deserves no less.

The statements and opinions contained in this editorial are solely those of the coeditors in chief.

FINANCIAL DISCLOSURES
None reported.

REFERENCES

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