



Celebrating Our Nurses

Nurses across the country were recognized and celebrated for their spirit of caring during Nurses Week, May 6 to 12. Our hospital, the University of Wisconsin Hospital and Clinics in Madison, had numerous events planned to honor and celebrate the contributions that nurses make to our patients and the organization. An event that I look forward to each year is the "Nurse Excellence Award Banquet," which honors 12 nurses who are nominated and recognized by their peers for their extraordinary contributions.

As the award winners were introduced, I was overcome by emotion. I listened to the impact that these 12 nurses have had on the lives of our patients, their co-workers, the community, the profession, and our institution, and I felt proud to be a nurse.

What a talented and caring group they are!

- Ann, a founding member of the Oncology Nursing Society (ONS), was only one of five oncology nurses in the country in 1969. She has assisted in setting the direction for oncology nursing as a profession.
- When Amy is teaching difficult procedures to patients, she talks to them about their personal lives and then applies what she learns to individualize her teaching strategy.
- Although Kate is always busy with nursing tasks and the nursing unit's high technical needs, she still also finds time to hold children and give them emotional comfort.
- Adam periodically serves as a volunteer in nursing to the needy in Nicaragua.
- "I would want Laoraine to care for me or any of the people I hold dear to me—anytime, anywhere," said a member of the Nominating Committee.
- Helen has developed a special bond with her patients diagnosed with head and neck cancer. These patients are frequently going through traumatic changes, and Helen's clinical expertise and calming approach with them and their families allow patients to gain the knowledge and confidence to care for themselves.

These are just a few examples of what nurses around the country contribute each day.

I salute nurses! However, I am very concerned that in the near future patients will not have the same high level of nursing care to which they have become accustomed because of the expected severe nursing shortage.

A new study released by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) confirms that nurses are essential in providing good patient care. The study, "Nurse Staffing and Patient Outcomes in Hospitals," shows that the number and mix of nurses in hospitals

affect patient outcomes. Researchers analyzed data from more than 5 million patient discharges and found a consistent relationship between patient outcomes and nursing staffing. The Oncology Nursing Society is also working on a study to identify the relationship between nursing care and quality outcomes in cancer patients. Both studies will help nursing to quantify the impact we have on patient care.

Meanwhile, legislators, health care advocates, and nurses used Nurses Week to begin to push a wide range of solutions to the nursing shortage problem. A bipartisan group of senators and representatives trumpeted the American Hospital Association-endorsed Nursing Reinvestment Act to address shortages in hospitals and other health care institutions.

At the same time, nearly 1,000 empty nursing shoes representing nurse vacancies in the United States covered the East Capitol stairway, and nurses from across the country called on members of Congress to improve working conditions in hospitals and curb the growing nursing shortage. During the rally, members of Congress announced that they plan to introduce a bill to outlaw mandatory overtime in an effort to attract and retain more nurses and to improve their working conditions.

Certainly this is a good start; but more planning, development, and hard work are needed. During my year as ACCC president, I will work with ONS to develop strategies to keep nurses caring for patients and bring new nurses into the profession. We will need your help. Nurses, physicians, and hospital administrators must become more active in developing policy and making policymakers aware of this important and potentially life-threatening issue. Nursing schools need to employ strategies to attract more students to their programs. Increased funding for nursing schools and nursing scholarships must be appropriated. Institutions need to look at how they can retain nurses by improving the work environment and keeping salaries for tenured nurses competitive. Cancer patients in all settings deserve to have their care provided by a nurse who is clinically skilled, compassionate, and knowledgeable.

Although Nurses Week has now passed, the nursing shortage still looms ahead like a dark cloud. Take time to look at how you can help keep oncology nurses caring for patients. ❧

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