

Education

Inspiring Nursing's Spirit: A Leadership Challenge for Nurse Educators

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In the midst of a faltering global economy, daunting technological change, an era of educated consumers, alternative therapies, genomics, increasingly complex care and one of the greatest shortages of nurses, the mandate of developing the professional potential of nursing presents a tremendous challenge. Charged with this responsibility, leaders in nursing education must find answers to some very difficult questions: Given limited agreement about the profession's unique knowledge base and practice focus, why would potential colleagues choose to enter nursing? Can aging faculties successfully replenish the profession's ranks with graduates equipped to deal with an ever-accelerating pace of change, an aging population, global epidemics,

increasing disease chronicity, interdisciplinary healthcare and "health" policy persistently oriented toward medical cure and economic constraint?

Faced with restructuring, downsizing, managed care and the business priorities of healthcare organizations, can nursing graduates be expected to sustain nursing's contribution to the betterment of health? Can they continue to mentor, role-model and support those who aim to fill the ranks of nursing? Despite the efforts of leaders of all nursing sectors, nursing research (Rawnsley 2003; Bowen et al. 2000), curriculum refinements (Butts and Lundy 2003; Chin 2001) and administrative efforts have yet to provide answers to these questions.

Recruitment and retention strate-

gies afford short-term, localized gains. Alas, one institution's gain is another's loss. The profession of nursing and the public it serves are really no further ahead. To date, dealing with retrenchment, recruitment, retention and scarce resources has, at best, consumed nurses' energies and perpetuated a task orientation. At worst, this focus has created burnout and alienation among nurses who face problems over which they have little immediate control. Unable to focus on nursing, nurses are becoming disillusioned, disheartened, demoralized and dispirited. In fact, the disappearance of nursing's spirit has become a fundamental problem, at one and the same time both an outcome and a root cause of unfulfilled professional potential, with long-term negative ramifications for nursing.

Solutions for restoring the spirit of nursing are easily articulated but not so easily executed. Recognizing the impact of current trends (retrenchment, recruitment, retention, scarce resources) on both individual and collective potential is the first step toward mobilizing that potential. Beyond this recognition, we need to redirect our energies to achieve three process aims:

- To provide positive affirmation for one another and for nursing as part of our day-to-day being.
- Consciously and conscientiously to envision what each of us has to contribute to creating the potential of nursing.
- To inspire and express that potential fully, individually and collectively, each and every day.

Affirming the Value of Nurses and Nursing

Daily effort to rekindle our professional self-appreciation is essential, as is redirecting our energies toward evolving nursing's unique professional contribution to health services that are increasingly transdisciplinary.

Approaches for regularly providing recognition and reward are concrete solutions. But affirmation also requires regular conscious effort to cultivate mutual trust and understanding among all nurses, with celebration, rather than denigration, of the myriad ways in which each contributes to the profession. Instead of focusing on what each of us cannot do, we need to acknowledge what each nurse has to contribute to the profession today, and nurture and build on these strengths for tomorrow. We need to build partnerships among sectors of nursing, institutions and practitioners, educators and researchers, mixing and mentoring to create mutually shared nursing knowledge, status and authority.

We also need to identify and overcome underutilization and misdirection of nurses' and nursing's potential to contribute to health services delivery, and actively engage in simultaneous creation and expression of our full potential through interdisciplinary education and practice. Curricula-on-paper, curricula-in-action and each and every one of us, as transformative leaders in all arenas, must attend to the socialization of students and colleagues so that together we achieve an open awareness, a connectedness and an active engagement in building our

individual and collective contributions through nursing.

Envisioning What Nurses and Nursing Have to Contribute

Despite high public esteem for the profession, our collective professional identity continues to be blurred by research not grounded in nursing science models and theories (Rawnsley 2003), by task orientation and role confusion in a practice world still largely shaped by the medical model and expert approach to care (Rawnsley 2003; Butts and Lundy 2003) and by narrow, often dogmatic task orientation in both content and approaches to nursing education (Butts and Lundy 2003; Chin 2001).

We need to take time to reflect critically on what we have contributed, to question what we are contributing and to choose consciously what we will contribute to healthcare in the future. We need to ask ourselves how well we are operationalizing the most current definition of health, and our professional potential for promoting and restoring health. We need, consciously and conscientiously, to shape our own destiny as part of collaborative interdisciplinary practice and nurture all nurses' ability to "think nursing" while partnering in interdisciplinary healthcare. It is up to all of us, nursing educators in particular, to work together, applying our knowledge, status and authority to create and express a shared understanding and interpretation of the culture of nursing in the larger context of interdisciplinary healthcare.

Consciously and conscientiously wielding the power of language is an important part of fostering the culture of nursing. We need to talk about strengths, contributions and opportunities, and build upon these attributes with full confidence in our potential to make a positive difference in healthcare. Nursing scholars have a special role to play in evolving and conveying the culture of nursing by addressing the right questions and by affording all nurses and the public in general greater opportunity to read about and experience the science of nursing.

Inspiring the Application of Our Full Potential

Inspiring spirit through our everyday way of being can be achieved only through taking time to infuse critical thinking, genuine feeling and renewed energy into our everyday efforts. We need to rekindle that animating, vital component within us that gives life and meaning to our professional being. Confronted with the potential outcomes of dispirit, now, as never before, society needs nurses to be nurses, to do nursing and collectively to enact inspired nursing as part of interdisciplinary healthcare.

The greatest challenge for leaders in nursing education today is to partner, consciously and conscientiously, with colleagues and students in a critically reflective, dialogic openness that restores nursing's spirit. In doing this, we will renew ourselves and all nurses as the resource at hand and inspire others to join our professional ranks. Retrenchment, recruitment, retention

and scarce resources will be addressed as nurses express themselves through reflection, relationships, personal practices and beliefs that represent and evolve the purpose, meaning and contribution of nursing.

References

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