

## Times of Crisis, Times of Action

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At the recent Academy of Canadian Executive Nurses (ACEN) Annual Meeting in November 2008 in Ottawa, I had the privilege and honour of becoming president of this dynamic organization. Founded more than 30 years ago, ACEN represents the voice of senior academic nursing leadership in Canada, helping to set directions for healthcare policy and contributing to the alignment and advancement of the national agendas for nursing practice, education, research and leadership.

Our collective voices have never been so important as Canadians, as nurses and as leaders. We have entered into extraordinary times; times that will affect us locally, nationally and globally. I believe we are now bearing witness to a scale of world change that is of unprecedented proportions; paradigm-shifting change that has not been experienced since the Second World War and the Great Depression. This shift is a result of many converging forces, including the recent startling economic downturn, advances in technology, the global nursing shortage and our aging demographics. As well, many provinces are experiencing changes in regulatory approaches governing professionals (i.e., through shared-scope-of-practice legislation) and the impact of the current wave of regionalization regarding provincial healthcare systems' governance (e.g., Alberta now has one provincial nursing leader). The convergence of these factors will influence our healthcare system to a much greater degree than any of the effects of health restructuring in the 1990s.

The Chinese word for *crisis* combines the characters for *danger* and *critical moment*. If we are to survive the perils of change and become stronger, we must seize this crucial moment and run with it. ACEN must and will do so. Strong leadership is required both to navigate these turbulent waters and to find creative, innovative solutions to problems that don't even yet exist. Indeed, ACEN is perfectly positioned to help create the solutions because we are the one organization that can provide a consistent, strong voice for senior nursing leaders; leaders

who are innovative, creative and knowledgeable about the system. This is what makes ACEN special. It offers access to a group of people who have vast knowledge about the system, and the skills and creativity to help create the future. Because it is the one clear voice for executive nurses, ACEN is important and can make a difference. We must, therefore, not step away from our commitments in these times of fiscal difficulty and challenge. Rather, we must take a leap of faith into the unknown, continue to support our profession across this great country of ours in the difficult times ahead and learn from our collective successes and failures. We must rise above the tumult and focus on the horizon of our vision. We must stay vigilant for opportunities to make a significant difference. Times of crisis and deep change are often the best times to push our own development. It is also a time to groom and support new leaders, as we work side by side.

As the organization continues to evolve, we can be proud of both our history and our recent accomplishments. ACEN is now incorporated and begins this year with a balanced budget. Our membership represents a well-positioned, strong, articulate voice for nursing leadership – passionate men and women who make a difference everyday in the work they do to improve our health policy, systems, client care and scholarship. We must maintain our cherished roots of leadership within the academic health enterprise because they offer a unique niche from which to leverage the integration of care, research and education: a space where innovative solutions for our troubled healthcare system can emerge. We must also seek to include the voices of nursing leaders in non-academic healthcare settings and use their knowledge and experience in delivering care, educating our future nurses and working with communities – because they, too, offer a unique perspective from which to leverage innovative solutions.

Under my leadership this coming year, ACEN will continue to build on the solid foundation laid down by the previous executive. Our strategic directions continue to support the health of Canadians, and the advancement of nursing and leadership in healthcare. We will strategically focus on urgent strategies, all of which are integrally entwined: (1) maintaining and building ACEN's membership, (2) focusing on leadership development, voice and sustainability and (3) shoring up our infrastructure through the building of sustainable administrative support.

As academic nursing leaders, our voice has never been so important. Together, let us be bold, action-oriented, engaged and courageous. If the power of one person can change the world, imagine the power of our collective voices together! I look forward with anticipation and excitement as this year unfolds, knowing that “when the going gets tough, the tough get going.” ACEN has made, does and will continue to make a difference. Join me in the journey, and thank you for your support.