

It's Time to Recognize Good Things

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It's time to celebrate some of the very good things that are happening for nursing and for nurses.

Nurses have long lamented our lack of visibility and the lack of public recognition for our contributions in many arenas. Physicians, rather than nurses, are more likely to be invited to address important clinical and policy issues. Major donations seem to flow much more readily and more generously to business and medical schools than to schools of nursing. But this is changing. There are a number of recent indicators that suggest nursing and nurses are being noticed or are bringing attention to themselves in articulate and informed ways. Let's start with major donations. There is no question that business faculties have been the major recipients of significant donations that lead to naming of the schools. Those that are in the news regularly include Richard Ivey (University of Western Ontario), Schulich (York University), Rotman (University of Toronto), Desautels (McGill University),

Asper (University of Manitoba) and Haskayne (University of Calgary) – and the list goes on. Schools of medicine have not enjoyed, or perhaps have resisted, this trend, and only two in Canada are named: Schulich (University of Western Ontario) and Michael G. DeGroote (McMaster University); however, schools of medicine routinely receive donations for their research, for special programs and to support their students.

Nursing has not shared in this distribution of wealth until recently. Canada had no named faculties until 2007, when the University of Toronto received a \$10-million donation that resulted in naming the Lawrence S. Bloomberg Faculty of Nursing. The University of Western Ontario followed in 2008, when another \$10-million donation led to the naming of the Arthur Labatt Family School of Nursing.

Mr. Labatt is the Chancellor of UWO, and I encourage you to read his remarks on the UWO website. He had the opportunity to make the donation to any of the university's worthy programs, but he chose nursing because of his respect for nurses and his view that "society has not always recognized the contribution of these bright and confident nursing professionals. ... Sonia and I would like to do our part to change this perception. We want to show our recognition of the importance of the nursing profession by contributing to the School of Nursing." In May 2008, Ryerson University announced that a \$5-million donation from Jack Cockwell, a member of its board of governors, would result in the naming of the Daphne Cockwell School of Nursing, after Mr. Cockwell's mother, who is a nurse. Ryerson is proud that their school is the first in the country to be named after a nurse.

Funding is flowing to nursing in Quebec. Richard and Satoko Ingram established the Newton Foundation in Montreal and decided that its resources would be directed to nursing. They made this decision because they believe that nurses are at the heart of the healthcare system and are under-celebrated despite their fundamental importance. Funding was first directed to the McGill School of Nursing, then to GRISIM (Groupe de recherche interuniversitaire en sciences infirmières de Montréal), the joint research unit between McGill and the University of Montreal (Cossette and Johnston

2007). More recently, funding contributed to the establishment of the Newton Foundation Research Chair in Nursing Care Development and Evaluation, which is reserved for McGill and the University of Montreal. Richard Ingram has demonstrated a unique capacity to leverage funding from numerous sources using the Newton Foundation's resources so that nursing benefits – for example, the Fonds de recherche en santé du Québec (FRSQ), the Quebec government's research funding organization, funds GRISIM and is a partner in the Newton Chair.

These donations put a spotlight on nursing and give it a prestige that has been reserved, till now, for higher-profile disciplines. Furthermore, there is something of a cascade effect. One school gets a major donation and a naming, and other philanthropists follow suit. But even more important, these donations have brought resources to schools of nursing and to their students that have not been available previously. All three of the named schools are using some of the funding for scholarships for undergraduate and graduate students.

Nursing is gaining attention in the media in some deliberate ways. The Johnson & Johnson Corporation began their Campaign for Nursing's Future in 2002 to recruit people to the profession. Although the campaign was multifaceted, the most public face was a series of 30-second TV ads designed to attract people to nursing as a career. They were not without controversy. Many nurses hated them. To get an analysis of their strengths and weaknesses, it is informative to read the review on the website of the Center for Nursing Advocacy. The major complaint about the ads was their "gooiness" – their portrayal of nurses as unhelpful angels. One memorable quotation captures the overall sense: "The basic message here is that nurses are kind, gentle hand-holders whose touch can touch the world in a touchingly touching display of touchability" (Center for Nursing Advocacy 2006). However, three newer ads released in 2007 were more favourably received. I have seen them while travelling in the USA, and I think they present nursing as attractive and diverse, both in its workforce and in its career options. Closer to home, the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario (RNAO) has posted attractive, informative ads in subway cars promoting nursing as a career.

Such initiatives, when they are well done, bring nursing to the public's attention in a positive way and help to reinforce to nurses the value of what they do. Evaluations (funded by Johnson & Johnson) indicate they are well received by nursing students, nurses and nurse executives in terms of their portrayal of nursing (Buerhaus et al. 2005; Donelan et al. 2005). I think the jury is still out on whether they have, in fact, brought individuals into nursing who might otherwise not have considered it. No one source can likely take credit for that, but if the ads from both Johnson & Johnson and RNAO, and others like them, serve to start someone thinking about nursing as a possible career, they have done their job.

Then there is Laura Berg. Never heard of her? She's an American psychiatric nurse who was working for a Veterans Administration Hospital when, immediately after Hurricane Katrina, she wrote a letter to the editor of the *Alibi*, a local newspaper in Albuquerque, New Mexico, denouncing the Bush administration's mishandling of Hurricane Katrina and the Iraq war. She explained in the letter that "as a VA nurse working with returning ... vets, I know the public has no sense of the additional devastating human and financial costs of post-traumatic stress disorder." She called on Americans to "act forcefully to remove a government administration playing games of smoke and mirrors and vicious deceit." When the VA machine got wind of it, they reported her to the FBI, who investigated her for possible sedition and seized her computer at work to examine the hard drive for evidence of seditious activities.

Berg pushed back and got the American Civil Liberties Union involved. In a subsequent TV interview, she described how she was told by the VA that she should not have identified herself as a nurse who worked for them. She responded: "I am saying I am a VA nurse. And some of my fire in writing this letter about Katrina and Iraq is from my experience as a VA nurse" (Democracy Now 2006). The VA backed off and finally apologized. In 2007, the PEN American Center, a literary organization that is committed to free expression, selected Laura Berg for their new award: the Katherine Anne Porter First Amendment Award and the \$10,000 that accompanies it. This award is for "ordinary people who take extraordinary stands to

defend the First Amendment – the right to freedom of expression” (PEN American Center 2007).

Canada has its own Laura Berg; Cathy Crowe of Toronto comes to mind immediately. Crowe is a “street nurse” who has devoted herself to eradicating homelessness. In the course of her campaign she has tackled politicians locally, provincially and federally, written dozens of letters to the editor, spoken out against and spoken about what homelessness does to people. She was one of the 10 individuals who founded the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee back in 1998. Her speeches are among the most compelling one might hear. Her book, *Dying for a Home*, portrays the real stories of the homeless. Her efforts have not gone unrecognized, and in June she received an honorary doctorate from the University of Ottawa (in addition to her previous honorary degrees from the University of Victoria and McMaster University). In 2004 Crowe was awarded the Atkinson Economic Justice Award in recognition of her work. This \$100,000 award over three years allows her to continue to advocate (which is too polite a word to convey the ferocity of the many battles she wages) for the homeless and against homelessness.

Crowe, who works in the public arena, and Berg, who wrote her letter to the editor from home, are nurses who always identify themselves as such in their stands against injustice and political ineptitude. Their voices are articulate and informed. They are role models for all of us.

So, it's summertime and the livin' is sort of easy. By the time you read this, it will be fall. There are good things happening, for nursing and for nurses, in recognition of the extraordinary contributions that our profession has made at home and internationally. It is good to acknowledge these efforts. Take a few minutes on a cool fall day to do that.

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