

What Are You?

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I HAD THE honor to be asked to present the keynote address at the December nursing convocation at our regional university, Western Carolina University. It was truly a privilege to be asked to address this esteemed group of nursing graduates. The opportunity caused me to pause in the middle of a very busy holiday season to think about my profession and what it means to me both personally and professionally. I thought that I would share some of my reflections in this editorial.

WHAT ARE YOU? What do you do? There are many responses that most of us can give to that question, often dependent on the context in which it is asked. I am a wife. I am a mom. I am a daughter, and with that, sometimes a caregiver. I am a church choir member. I am an editor. At some points in my life I have been a room mother, a soccer mom, and more times than my family has cared to count, I too have been a student. The constant thing across my entire adult life, however, is that I AM A NURSE!

I AM A NURSE. So what does that mean? How does that identity form, and how does it continue to mature and be sustained?

I AM A NURSE. I feel like I have always been a nurse. I grew up around nursing; I was immersed from birth. I was the toddler who got dressed up as a nurse for Halloween because nurses were, and are, my heroes. Figure 1 is a picture of my first hero. This is my mom, my nurse, my mentor, my hero. The cape, the hat, white dress and hose,



Figure 1. My mom: Frances Davis, RN. This figure is available in color online at www.jopan.org.

and white shoes polished daily. This generation of nurses learned to assess, diagnose, and intervene, and their only technology was their stethoscope. They relied on their senses, their guts, and their critical thinking. As students, they staffed and ran the hospital at night. They trained the residents (and they never let those residents forget that). They did what needed to be done. While I graduated from a wonderful school and *thought* I knew a lot, I learned what it was to be a real nurse from my mom. She was an emergency department (ED) director when I was in high school. I would hang out in the ED triage. The nurses were cool—the blood and guts were GREAT! By the time that I graduated from nursing school, my mom worked as the House Supervisor, which back then, served as the Rapid Response Team. As a new nurse, I ran my first code with my mom. I cracked my first chest with my mom. The reality is that there are very few crazy, made-for-TV patient emergencies that I don't remember undertaking without my mom having some role. She

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Conflict of interest: None to report.

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1089-9472/\$36.00

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jopan.2018.12.003>

was always there, always taking action, and always on target.

In addition to skills, however, my mom also taught me what it is to truly *be a nurse*. To be a nurse is to be confident. You are with the patient more than any other care provider. You are the last line of defense and the first line of offense. You are the primary patient advocate. You are as smart, as astute, and as committed as any other provider. Never hesitate to provide your opinion. Never hesitate to ask for the order or intervention that you know the patient needs. My mom understood long before SBAR was created that the most important component in Situation, Background, Assessment, and Recommendation is the RECOMMENDATION. You are at the bedside. You know the patient and their family the best. Most times you know what they need, or perhaps, what they don't need or want. And evidence indicates that most physicians need and *want* to hear your opinion.

YOU ARE A NURSE. With that title also comes obligations. As a bachelor's or master's prepared nurse, you will be looked to for leadership: to lead unit professional and shared governance councils, to lead evidence-based practice and quality initiatives, to host journal clubs, and more. You will be tapped to lead the next generation of nurses as their preceptors and mentors. Regardless of your role or specialty, you will be looked at to lead in both formal and informal capacities.

YOU ARE A NURSE. Yours is ranked as the most trusted profession in the country—above physicians, above first responders, even above lawyers and politicians (although that may not be saying much). You will be expected to respond to emergencies and issues across the community. In the grocery store in your scrubs and someone falls out? You will be looked at to respond. Team mom or bystander at the ball field when an injury occurs? The coach will come to you for advice. “Is it broken? Do they have a concussion? Can I put them back in?” Elderly member falls out at church? You will be looked at to respond. People will ask you for help. “What should I do about my surgery? About my heart? My cancer? Can you get me an appointment? Can you get me bumped

up on the surgical schedule? A better room? A better doctor?” Everyone assumes that you know everything about every diagnosis.

YOU ARE A NURSE. You have a responsibility to be engaged and pursue lifelong education. Health care is changing too rapidly to stand on your laurels. Pursue your specialty certification. Continue to advance your education. Always keep dreaming, always keep moving.

YOU ARE A NURSE. You are also expected to serve. You owe it to the community to serve. You have skills and insights that few others can bring to the table. On church leadership teams, mission trips, PTAs or PTOs, food pantries, local commissions and boards, you will see things that no else even notices or thinks of. Why are we packing food boxes with Ramen noodles and cupcakes, when the primary health issues in the community are hypertension and diabetes? A church group is focused on ministering to the homeless, but is that ministry inclusive of addressing basic physical and psycho-social needs? Is it inclusive of all ethnicities and gender affiliations? Be engaged—ask the questions—ask the hard questions.

YOU ARE A NURSE. You may elect to become involved politically. There is no one more qualified to serve at the local, state, and national level than a nurse. Nurses have “in the trenches” perspectives on the majority of national issues of the day: gun violence, health care access and reform, children's health issues, and global health issues. We have the knowledge and capacity to speak to all of these crises. Local county commissions and school boards are wonderful places where nurses can positively influence the health of the community. There are nurses serving in the US Congress. Nurses have served on numerous presidential councils. Nurses are serving on global boards and associations. Our voices, our knowledge, are critical to impacting positive change at all levels.

YOU ARE A NURSE. You are a member of the greatest profession that there is...or ever will be! The world is yours for the taking, womb to tomb, any specialty, any care delivery environment. Acute care...behavioral health...home health...telehealth...primary care...school health...public

health...bedside...management...leadership...
quality and safety...informatics...education...
research...writing and publication. You name it,
you can do it, even those things we haven't
thought of yet. Wherever the human race ventures
on this earth, or across the universe, there will be a
need and a niche for nursing.

**I AM A NURSE...I AM A PROFESSIONAL...I CAN
CHANGE THE WORLD!**

Embrace your profession. Embrace your specialty.
Support and honor your colleagues in all that
they do. Make 2019 the year to be the best that
you can be.