

## Leaving a Legacy of Caring

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**OVER THE PAST** few years I have watched as perianesthesia and other nursing colleagues have retired. The number of years worked varies. The reasons for retirement are multifactorial. Common themes include the desire to travel when healthy, the need to care for a family member, the wish to grow hobbies and interests into full time practices, and occasionally because of illness or loss. Of course, a few people are just tired...tired of the pace, the pressures, and the changes in health care, seemingly occurring on a daily basis.

This year as I prepare to attend ASPAN's National Conference and as the association closes in on 40 years of existence, I am thinking of how the association has evolved and of the changes that have occurred in perianesthesia nursing and nursing in general. I am also cognizant of a new generation of perianesthesia nurses rising in the association and stepping into committee and leadership roles as many of us approach the end of our nursing careers.

Although I did not begin my career in the "Recovery Room" as it was once known, I knew once I was there, it was a place I wanted to stay. For more than 40 years of practice, the experience of nursing has changed significantly. I admit, I think somewhat longingly of my early days in that old Recovery Room as the "good old days"—life was much simpler then. Technology was limited. One monitor for 12 bays, unless you counted an old oscilloscope-

type monitor that sat on a cart in the corner and put into use when we desperately needed a second monitor. My ears hurt when I left work from all the blood pressures and lungs I auscultated in a day. Pumps were limited to infusions of medications such as lidocaine for premature ventricular contractions (PVCs), or levophed and regitine for severe hypotension, or a nitroglycerin drip to reduce that increased blood pressure. Oxygen saturation measurements were in the future; assessing for cyanosis was critical and routine oxygen supplementation expected.

Truthfully, nursing and health care were not necessarily better, perhaps simpler and less complex, but not better. Advances in health care and technology may challenge us but lives have been saved and improvements made across all medicine and in our practice of perianesthesia nursing. We have experienced tremendous innovation in clinical practice, in the transition from paper to electronic documentation, in the exploration of clinical thinking and judgment, support for nursing research to answer pertinent clinical questions, and the implementation of those findings through evidence-based practice innovation. I want to believe through all this change we have not lost sight of why we chose nursing in the first place.

### Nursing: Why It Matters

I have long believed I chose nursing for the "right" reasons to provide care for the sick and suffering and to promote health and well-being for all. For most of my adolescence, I was convinced I was not going to be a nurse. My mother is a nurse. I knew that to be a nurse would mean I had to be as good as she was, and I was not certain I could be. Fortunately, I overcame my fear and chose nursing...and have never regretted my choice. But I also knew that I would not be satisfied by nursing just being a job—it is a career and that I would need give back where I could for it to be meaningful.

I recently came across ASPAN Past President Susan Shelander's "President's Page" from 2001,

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which she titled “Creating Our Nursing Legacy.”<sup>1</sup> She spoke of our responsibility as nurses to make a difference and leave a legacy of opportunity and active participation in our profession. We have moments and encounters where we focus on the tasks instead of the impact that we can have on our patients and colleagues. As we act in the roles of preceptors, mentors, followers, and leaders, we have opportunities to create our legacy in our profession.

Whether you act as a preceptor to new staff in your unit, mentor others by challenging their thinking or suggest new ideas, use our ability as followers to move goals into action or give strength and momentum to visions, or become a leader either in your workplace or in an association such as ASPAN, you are creating your legacy. Kennedy stated in an editorial in the American Journal of Nursing that nursing is “a profession with a legacy of service and social commitment.”<sup>2</sup> Assuming the roles as Shelander described will give meaning to your career as a nurse and provide you with a legacy that helps others remember you by.<sup>1</sup> Take advantage of opportunities in your daily practice by offering to precept new perianesthesia nurses, participate on unit or hospital committees, or take the lead on practice projects that can improve quality and safety in your workplace.

### **Opportunities Present Themselves When Least Expected**

I have long believed if you wait for the door to open for your next opportunity, you will miss moments to grow, evolve, and change. Sometimes, it is a window that opens, and then not too widely, presenting you with an opportunity you may have never considered or conceived. I recall the late Anne Allen, ASPAN Past President, calling me aside at an early Board of Directors meeting, suggesting I consider applying for the journal editorship. Who? Me? Why? I had written one article that had yet to be published. I had never edited anything but school papers. Anne saw something in me and mentored me; she helped me ask myself, why not? That “window opening” led me to become an editor, and more importantly, an author who used the opportunity to create word pictures of what it was to be a perianesthesia nurse, or as we were then known, a postanesthesia nurse who practiced in all phases of postanesthesia nursing.<sup>3</sup>

### **What Opportunities Are out There for You?**

Hinds et al<sup>4</sup> published in Nursing Outlook an intriguing article on creating a “legacy map,” a variant of interpretation of the meaning of legacy but with the intent of clarifying role and purpose of the author of the map. Although the article addresses the use of a legacy map from an academic or leadership level, I believe there is opportunity for newer nurses to begin the process of creating a legacy map to guide their future work and focus on what they wish to accomplish as nurses in their careers. The intent is to help identify how you can “contribute to the well-being of others through purposeful and meaningful work engagement.”<sup>4</sup> The authors ask two key questions, the answers to which serve as your declared legacy. These are questions we could all ask ourselves as we embark on careers or we transition into new roles in nursing. The two questions are as follows:

“What do you want to be in nursing because of you and your efforts?”

“What would you like best to be known for by others?”<sup>4</sup>

### **What Will You Be Known For?**

What will you leave, and what will you be remembered for, in your legacy? Will you be remembered as the perianesthesia nurse who could always calm the frightened, fretful child or soothe the anxious, tearful adult? Will you be remembered as the leader who listened, collaborated, and guided their staff through busy schedules and staff shortages? Will you be remembered as the educator who asked questions, wisely counseled, and guided new nurses through a class or orientation? Will you be remembered as the researcher who asked the clinically relevant question and conducted research that changed perianesthesia practice?

Regardless of your role in perianesthesia nursing, you should be remembered for your gifts for advancing nursing practice and the specialty of perianesthesia nursing. As a staff nurse at the bedside, you are the heart and soul of nursing on the frontline. You may have moved into an advanced practice role, an administrative position, a research or academic position, but you all have

contributed to nursing in a meaningful and purposeful way. If you are approaching the end of your nursing career, reflect on where you have been and what you have done to advance perianesthesia nursing. If you are beginning your career as a perianesthesia nurse, reflect on what professional contributions you will make. Create the legacy map. Think about your practice in the years ahead.

Make your career in the profession of nursing rewarding, for yourself, but especially for your patients and colleagues.

As Laskowski-Jones<sup>5</sup> stated in an editorial in 2016, “professional fulfillment isn’t always achieved by what we get, but more so by what we leave behind.”

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