

## Editorial

### Courage dedication and teamwork saving lives

Although we do not want to listen to any COVID-19 news or messages, we cannot forget our nurses working on the frontline and risking their lives to care for patients, the elderly and the vulnerable. 2020 International Year of the Nurse and Midwife – a year of celebrations to honour and thank the nurses making a difference in our lives.

The outbreak in some remote country, then a global pandemic and then suddenly becoming a reality in South Africa on 5 March 2020, changed the nursing profession forever. Nurses have taken a leading role, working on the frontline and advocating for their profession, their education and the health and wellbeing of their patients and colleagues. The struggle to obtain sufficient PPE, beds and equipment has placed enormous stress on the healthcare system and therefore also on the optimal functioning of the nurses.

International Nurses Day 2020 on 12 May and the 200th birthday of Florence Nightingale, was celebrated within unique circumstances. This year we celebrate and acknowledge the heroes who are always where they are needed and willing to sacrifice their own health for the health of others. A day that reminded us of the importance of Florence Nightingale in our history and whose influence on modern nursing will always be remembered. The lessons of Florence Nightingale's nursing practice during the cholera outbreak in London and the Crimean War are still being applied today during the COVID-19 pandemic – basic handwashing, maintaining standards of cleanliness, learning from the data, and more. Florence Nightingale would no doubt, be very proud of our nurses today.

Her learnings from the data in the work she was doing, provide an interesting insight in converting numbers into pictures that start to show the positive increments in what we are dealing with. During the Crimean War it was found that large numbers of soldiers died of preventable causes which could be averted by improved sanitation and cleanliness. She and William Farr, an innovative statistician, translated the data of the army hospitals into a diagram later known as the "Nightingale Rose Diagram".<sup>1</sup> This diagram contained plotted data on a monthly basis in wedges – the data being the three categories of deaths identified. As the months went by, the wedges formed a spiral highlighting the progress made over time. While this started to make a beautiful picture looking like a rose, we cannot forget that the devil is in the detail and that proper analysis of data is also required. But the lesson perhaps for the time we find ourselves in is this: while the number of confirmed cases is rising

as we were expecting it to, if we look at a picture of the statistics, we note that the majority of patients (52%) have recovered and the deaths represent 2% of the numbers to date who were reportedly patients with comorbidities. While it is devastating for nurses and the families of those we could not save, this alone should show that nurses are making a difference even though we all feel overwhelmed by the pandemic.

For nurse leaders the lessons learnt include the importance of several principles – being open and transparent, creating a learning environment, sharing vulnerability and holding onto the positive changes emerging during this time. Nurse leaders confirm the pride they have in their nurses' courage, dedication to patients and the teamwork nurses bring to their patients. Even during this time of masks, visors, gowns, gloves and social distancing, nurses are still providing the compassionate care patients need to help them heal from this unknown virus.

"Your compassion and kindness as you listen and allay fears and anxieties associated with scary news of testing positive for COVID-19 infection does not go unnoticed. Your compassion and comfort to patients who cannot be with their loved ones at the bedside through the journey of COVID-19 is the best gift to our patients, a gift that no amount of money can buy," said Dr Zwelini Mkhize.<sup>2</sup>

The pandemic is a major challenge for our health systems and the economic impact on the country, but overcoming COVID-19 will take an enormous effort – but if we take hands, stand together and live a positive message, our country will survive and be a stronger nation for it.

"As a nation, we owe our well-being to the untiring commitment of nurses, whose positive impact on our lives reaches beyond our physical health," President Cyril Ramaphosa said.<sup>2</sup>

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#### References

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