

Editorial

The nursing profession – rise to the occasion



The shortage of nurses to provide for the healthcare needs of the country was again emphasised during the two years of managing a pandemic. The desperate need for critical care nurses, emergency care nurses, primary health care nurses and psychiatric nurses was evident, and therefore our future must include training large numbers of professional nurses to provide for these critical shortages. The ageing nursing workforce carried the country through this pandemic, but momentum is needed to prepare the country not only for the current needs, but also for the unknown when the ageing nursing resources will no longer be available to cover for the shortages.

The nursing profession continuously advances and each of us must contribute to professional excellence and career advancement. The use of technology to share best practices is but one of the instruments available to assist in the advancement of the profession. Investing in upskilling of nurses to maximise digital literacy is important in our effort to improve the competency and productivity of nurses. We tend to criticise nurses incorporating multimedia to get prompt information to assist in the care of their patients, but the importance of digital literacy must not be underestimated. The benefits of digital literacy among nurses will be seen in the patient-centred approach of the nurses as well as improved efficiencies in the delivery of care. The early lessons learned from Florence Nightingale in the use of informatics to improve care and productivity are proven evidence of the importance of the use of information and data.

Investing in nursing education, including upskilling our existing workforce, is the only means of addressing the changing nursing

and health industry. Nursing professionals must ensure that patient care keeps up with the changes and demands in the health industry. Nursing leaders must make themselves available for leadership roles where they can have a direct influence on healthcare planning. They have to take an active role in shaping policies that will enable the profession to perform to the full extent of their education and training. The leaders in nursing education therefore have a major responsibility to equip new entrants into the profession with the competence that will help build a nursing workforce that will contribute their unique skills to the delivery of quality, safe health and patient care, even in uncertain and unfamiliar situations.

As an outcome of the COVID-19 pandemic, the nursing profession gained much respect as being the backbone of the healthcare system. Many stories were shared during the pandemic of nurses being the heroes as they held the hands of those they cared for when their loved ones could not do so. This is now the time to take on the challenge to build the nursing profession in South Africa into a profession that is knowledgeable and highly respected, a profession that will attract young talented people to join the nursing fraternity.

The theme of the Forum for Professional Nursing Societies 2021 conference, *Collaboration Breaking Barriers*, laid the foundation for the most needed action to be taken to develop and advance our professional nurses. All the general and specialist nurses must realise that working together in the interest of patients will give impetus to the profession to implement much needed changes to improve the capabilities of our nursing workforce and avoid the collapse of our healthcare system.

Nurses have shown throughout history that the profession can rise to the occasion, now is a better time than ever to prove history right with a historical reminder of the words of Florence Nightingale:

“The world, more especially this hospital world, is in such a hurry, moving so fast that it is too easy to slide into bad habits before we are aware.”

Annelie Meiring

Editor: PNT