

## Passionate about caring



“Caring is the heart and soul of the nursing profession.” This is a statement widely used by nurses and members of the general public. Do nurses realise that their actions are always evaluated against the caring experienced? Skills and competence are only some of the building blocks in the patient’s overall experience.

Much has been said about the old and new nursing qualifications, the old and new schools of thought, and what to teach nurses. The debate should be on how to incorporate the essence of caring as the basis of all teaching and learning if we really want to influence the future of nursing positively.

Much to my surprise, *An Old Lady’s Poem*<sup>1</sup> was the essence of a New Year’s Eve service I attended. This might not have been the message that I wanted to hear, but it made me think of the year ahead, as well as my focus for 2016!

### An Old Lady’s Poem

When an old woman died in the geriatric ward of a small hospital near Dundee, Scotland, it was felt that she had nothing left of any value. Later, when the nurses went through her meagre possessions, they found this poem. Its quality and content so impressed the staff that copies were made and distributed to every nurse in the hospital. One nurse took her copy to Ireland. The old woman’s sole bequest to posterity has since appeared in the Christmas edition of the *News Magazine* of the Northern Ireland Association for Mental Health.

This old Scottish woman, with seemingly nothing left to offer to the world, became the author of this simple, yet eloquent, poem, which has been travelling the world by Internet. It just goes to show that we all leave some “footprints in time”.

This is the poem:

“What do you see, nurses, what do you see?  
What are you thinking when you’re looking at me?  
A crabbit old woman, not very wise,  
Uncertain of habit, with faraway eyes?  
Who dribbles her food and makes no reply  
When you say in a loud voice, “I do wish you’d try!”  
Who seems not to notice the things that you do,

And forever is losing a stocking or shoe.  
Who, resisting or not, lets you do as you will,  
With bathing and feeding, the long day to fill.  
Is that what you’re thinking? Is that what you see?  
Then open your eyes, nurse. You’re not looking at me.

I’ll tell you who I am as I sit here so still,  
As I do your bidding, as I eat at your will.  
I’m a small child of ten, with a father and mother,  
Brothers and sisters, who love one another.  
A young girl of sixteen, with wings on her feet,  
Dreaming that soon now a lover she’ll meet.  
A bride soon at twenty – my heart gives a leap,  
Remembering the vows that I promised to keep.  
At twenty-five now, I have young of my own,  
Who need me to guide, and a secure happy home.  
A woman of thirty, my young now grown fast,  
Bound to each other with ties that should last.  
At forty, my young sons have grown and are gone,  
But my man’s beside me to see I don’t mourn.  
At fifty once more, babies play round my knee,  
Again we know children, my loved one and me.  
Dark days are upon me, my husband is dead.  
I look at the future, I shudder with dread.  
For my young are all rearing young of their own,  
And I think of the years and the love that I’ve known.

I’m now an old woman, and nature is cruel.  
’Tis jest to make old age look like a fool.  
The body, it crumbles, grace and vigour depart,  
There is now a stone where I once had a heart.  
But inside this old carcass a young girl still dwells,  
And now and again my battered heart swells.  
I remember the joys, I remember the pain,  
And I’m loving and living life over again.  
I think of the years, all too few, gone too fast,  
And accept the stark fact that nothing can last.  
So open your eyes, nurses, open and see...  
...not a crabbit old woman. Look closer...see me!”

The theme for International Nurses Day 2016 is “Nurses: a force for change: improving health systems’ resilience”. While planning for this major event, let us keep in mind that the patient must be the focus in our management, teaching and nursing care.

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### References

1. Anonymous. An Old Lady’s Poem. Care Pathways [homepage on the Internet]. c2016. Available from: <https://www.carepathways.com/anoldladyspoem.cfm>