

Education Matters

Encouraging political participation among the next generation

It is now two years since I wrote my column on Magnet status as a direct result of returning from the global nursing Honour society of Sigma Theta Tau International's 43rd Biennial convention in Las Vegas in November 2015 (Rosser 2016). Now I have just returned from my visit to the 44th Biennial Convention in Indianapolis feeling equally uplifted. As previously, have witnessed a collegiality and friendship with nurse leaders from the other side of the globe as keen as myself to reach out to and collaborate. One of the most inspirational experiences this year was the society's recognition of one of our own eminent nurse leaders, and a member of Sigma's all-England Chapter, Dame Yvonne Moores with a Distinguished Lifetime Achievement Award – only achieved by 5 individuals previously, in the almost 100 years history of the organisation. Dame Yvonne was Chief Nursing Officer for Wales, then Scotland and subsequently England. As advisor to the Prime Minister and to the Secretary of State for Health on policy, she always strived to improve the quality of clinical services and was well respected in her role. To have held all three positions is a historic achievement and unlikely ever to be equalled. Her acceptance speech was inspirational and the audience were moved by her words as well as her achievements. If there are lessons to be learned from this then I would suggest that, as with the USA, we, in the UK need to be more politically aware of the decisions that are made at policy level that influence our profession, our ways of working and our futures. Now, with nurse education requiring graduate status to become a first level registered nurse in the UK, nurse education programmes should, in my view be preparing nurses of the future to become more politically aware. Indeed Woodward et al (2016), in their exploration of current literature, advocate nurses' political participation with the objective of helping others and advancing relevant agendas. They recognise the importance of political participation and identify three modifiable factors that promote public engagement among nurses. Not surprisingly, these include a) a personal interest in political knowledge. b) membership of a professional organisation and c) the most important factor for me, the inclusion of political education into the nursing curriculum.

At present there are a number important government inquiries into nursing (eg Longhurst 2017, Merrifield 2017) and consultations such as those on the NMC Standards for prequalifying nursing (NMC 2017) and for advanced practice (NHS 2017) as well as for the nursing associate, and shortly for midwives, about which nurses need to have an opinion and make their voice heard. As the largest healthcare profession in terms of numbers, their expertise in leading patient care, their trustworthiness, honesty and integrity in advocating for the needs of their patients and their direct insights into how various aspects of healthcare affect individuals and populations, nurses are well placed to offer an opinion, yet they are disinclined to contribute (Woodward et al 2016). As a nurse educator, I feel a personal responsibility to actively involve nurses at all levels in encouraging them to have an opinion, to challenge public perceptions and read for their degree in order to be better informed. If, through their education programme, they could be encouraged to publish themselves, they may be more interested in seeking out others opinions in the press.

I cannot hide my sense of pride that one of our own nurse leaders was given such an accolade at an American conference of over 2000 delegates. However, we have a lot to do to make sure that we inspire our young academics coming forward to bring the excitement of

nursing politics to the attention of the next generation nurse leaders who are currently on their journey to Registered Nurse. I do spend a short time with our own Advanced Clinical nursing students, encouraging their excitement in the politics of nursing and discussing just how they can contribute. However, this is a job for us all. Education both at University and in practice need to foster a sense of inquiry among our students as well as our fellow colleagues to lead by example, just as Dame Yvonne did for our predecessors. Nurses know and understand what many of the problems are in the health service and may have views as to how to improve it. With their good communication ability to collaborate and influence, nurses are well placed to make a difference. Let us make sure we encourage them to have a voice.

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