

The richness of nursing comes from both seasoned and novice RNs



Welcome to a busy season. There seems each year to be something special about the onset of fall. Whatever that something special is, it inevitably results in a

sudden increase in pace, as if we are suddenly running towards a just-in-view goal post. The (relative) quiet of summer recedes to memory as new challenges and successes appear on our horizon.

This year marks only the second time I have watched the coming alive of a university campus from the vantage point of interim director of its nursing program. I am struck this year, as I was last year, by the energy, the vision and the promise of future change that comes with a new group of students. Someone asked me recently if I remember experiencing the same energy and excitement when I was a student, now almost 40 years ago. The answer surprised me because the truth is ... "only in part."

While many things have changed, some things remain the same.

And one of those constants is that moment of first entry to nursing. As new students, or as novice nurses, we cannot expect to adapt immediately to the culture of the nursing community. That is as true today as it was decades ago. There is much that is new and unknown, frightening and exciting as we embark on our careers. While nursing education can play a critical role in preparing students for the culture of the profession, it is, to some extent, akin to studying the culture of another country from a distance, and only visiting from time to time. Until one is fully immersed in that new culture – living and experiencing the day-to-day reality – it is not possible to fully belong.

At the same time, we do see substantive changes in language, communication and social customs. Our nursing workplaces are now multigenerational and these three par-

ticular elements differ among those generations. These differences do not make nursing better nor worse. They're neither right nor wrong. They're simply differences.

The accepted language and behaviour of nurses in the early 70s were very different from that expected of nurses in the 21st century. The social, economic and political

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forces that shape those who are now entering the profession differ from those that I – and many RNs already in practice – experienced when we began our careers.

As nurses, however, we are trained to bridge the differences between cultures, building on the fundamental belief that respect underpins each and every successful relationship – whether with a patient or a professional colleague.

One of the great leadership challenges in nursing today is bridging the differences within nursing itself. We pride ourselves

on being caring professionals who can identify, respect and support the needs of patients and their families from different cultures and backgrounds. We pride ourselves as Canadians on the concept of the mosaic rather than the melting pot. And we strive to respect the strengths that come from a broad and diverse range of histories and traditions. Why then is it so difficult for us to accept differences within our own community? How will we move as a profession to demonstrate that fundamental respect for each other, every day, as we work side-by-side in our chosen profession? The answer is stunningly simple: mutual respect.

Respect is vital if we are to forge successful relationships within our own profession. As critical as it is for novice nurses and new students to respect the knowledge, skills and abilities of experienced nurses in practice – to respect their language and social customs – so too is it critical for those experienced nurses in each and every one of our workplaces to extend that same respect to our newest colleagues and students. Each generation brings to our nursing community a richness that serves us, and our patients, well. If we apply the same perspective of respect within our shared profession as we use in our daily practice, we will all be better for it. In fact, we owe each other, irrespective of our differences, the deepest and most genuine respect. It's a point worth repeating.

As the autumn leaves begin to turn, and as our novice colleagues and our newest students embark on their nursing journeys, I invite each and every one of you to join me in respecting our differences, treasuring our similarities and celebrating our shared passion to improve the lives of individuals and communities across our province, our country and our world. We can be the change we want to see. **RN**

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