

2020 – A National Nursing Strategy: it's time

Happy 2020 International Year of the Nurse and Midwife. This will be an important year for nurses and midwives around the world, with a focus on us and our work in a way that has never before been experienced. The World Health Organization (WHO) has declared many years as focus years but always this has been a focus on a health problem. It has never been a focus on any health professional group. It signals the importance the Director-General (DG), the Executive Board, and the Member States place on nursing and midwifery's contributions to enabling people everywhere to have equitable access to healthcare without being financially crippled by the interaction or, as WHO calls it: universal health coverage.

This is an extraordinary recognition but one that did not happen by accident or by the DG just deciding it might be a good idea. Months of hard talking, discussion, lobbying, and organising happened behind the scenes. This was led by Nursing Now and Lord Crisp, the Nursing Now co-chair, in particular. It demonstrates the planning, networking and highly skilled political workings that are behind most seemingly simple initiatives, and it is this strategic political working that I want to highlight at this beginning of our focus year. Such an opportunity to influence may not come again and we must not squander it.

The Nursing Now campaign, as so many of you know, is a three-year *HEALTH* campaign highlighting the important contribution nurses can make to health access and outcomes. It is *NOT* a Nursing campaign, despite what it may have at times appeared to be. The campaign was designed to highlight the fact that globally, nurses are undervalued and underutilised. It was, of course, necessary for nurses to know and understand the campaign and the report from which it arose – the Triple Impact Report from the United Kingdom – and to do their internal professional housekeeping,¹ but it is also an essential part of the campaign to engage influential non-nurses to take forward the message of the barriers to our greater potential contribution and to help forge a path to redress this. Nursing Now is about engaging with politicians of all political persuasion to demonstrate the evidence of our potential contribution and also to educate the media and community about a contemporary understanding of nursing and the benefits of broader engagement of nurses in health services and in health policy. In these areas outside the nursing bubble we have not made as much ground in Australia as hoped. But it's not too late! We still have 2020, so let's look at how we can best make use of this year of focus.

In Australia we have some stellar nursing organisations led by committed Boards and Chief Executive Officers (or equivalent in title) and in the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF), we have the largest union in the country, organised and well-led. Together we represent enormous potential electoral/political power. Why then are we not more politically influential? One of the reasons, I believe, is that we don't have a unified, collaborative plan – a National Nursing Strategy – that is agreed by all stakeholders, including the community and to which all key nursing organisations are committed to do their part as that part aligns with their mission. This is not a piece of work to be directed by government or by government chief nurses. It is not their role. It is a professional responsibility, and, I would say, a requirement for any self-regulating profession to have a map of how they can meet their society's mandate in the most effective way and to be working towards this. Such a strategy enables a consensus response to approaches such as the recent National Nursing Education Review,² or to proactively approach politicians pre-election or pre-budget and seek their public commitment to our policy positions for health and social care.

The year 2020 will be a time for celebration – no doubt – a time for a spotlight on our professions. Our responsibility is to be ready to make this more than just a party. Let us commit to have a National Nursing Strategy by the end of 2020 so the public, the community organisations, the other health professional groups, and the whole of government knows what we offer, the evidence base for our claim, the priorities we see for healthcare, and our inclusion in this such that Australia has better healthcare equity and access and so no-one is left behind or impoverished by becoming sick.

The ANMF is the oldest and largest of our professional organisations and is the facilitator of the Coalition of National Nursing and Midwifery Organisations (CoNNMO) to which all other organisations are invited to participate. You have the talent, you have the commitment, you have the opportunity, and you have the mandate. If we manage to end the year with such a National Strategy, as well as raising the profile of the profession, demonstrating that it has been undervalued and underutilised, we will also have a plan for redressing this and making our appropriate contribution to health and healthcare in Australia.

EDITORIALS

I do not underestimate the challenge of this seemingly simple initiative – like most seemingly simple initiatives, it will require enormous commitment, political savvy, funding, data and evidence gathering, networking, self-reflection, and unselfishness. But no-one else will or should do it for us.

As the famous, old slogan goes “It’s time”.

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REFERENCES

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