

Challenges for You in 2015

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For most of you, last year was probably a challenging one, both professionally and personally, with such issues as Ebola and its many ramifications, flu vaccinations that weren't as protective as touted due to a mutation in the virus, mandatory nurse-patient ratios, the debate over 8 hour vs. 12 hour shifts, violence in the workplace, care for undocumented immigrants, mandatory overtime, overtime in general to complete needed patient care and documentation of that care, and continued barriers to advanced practice in many states.

You were there, on the front lines, caring for patients despite all these detractors, speaking up for the patient, and for yourselves, on important issues related to each issue you personally faced.

Your actions and voices were seen and heard respectively by the public. In Gallup's 2014 poll, released on December 18, 2014, nurses were ranked as the #1 trusted profession in the U.S. This rank has consistently been the case since 1999 (with the only exception in 2001), according to the American Nurses Association (ANA).

In the 2014 poll, 80 % of Americans saw nurses as having "very high" or "high" standards of honesty and ethics. Not a bad reputation, to be sure.

In 2015, you will clearly face continuing and new challenges that require ethical—and legal—approaches to the profession and to patient care. Some of those challenges include:

1. Promoting preventative care;
2. Advocating for an increase in access to health care for all;
3. Becoming a leader to advance health care through participation in professional associations, facility committees and boards;
4. Encouraging inter-professional collaboration;
5. Advancing your own educational credentials; and
6. Adopting "wearable technology" such as tablets that connect to the patient's EMR and bracelets that monitor your vital signs for indications of fatigue before a potential patient care error occurs.^{1,2}

Ethical approaches to the challenges you face in 2015 are coupled with their own legal facets which, if violated, can result in a disciplinary action against the nurse. Some state nurse practice acts and/or rules incorporate the ANA Code of Ethics by reference as a guideline for nurse licensees' conduct. When a section or sections of the act or rules are breached, such as when allegations of unprofessional conduct are raised about a nurse's conduct, a disciplinary proceeding against the nurse may be initiated by the board of nursing.

Other nurse practice acts and/or rules have specifically spelled out the ethical expectations of the nurse license couched as codes of conduct, standards of nursing practice, or specific ethical principles by which the nurse must practice. Here, too, a breach of these expectations can result in disciplinary proceedings against the nurse.

So, your “front line” position will need to continue, melded with ethical and legal principles that have served you and your profession appropriately and justly through all these years.

Keep up the good work. My best wishes for a Happy, Healthy, and Productive New Year!

FOOTNOTES

1. Sue Hassmiller (September 3, 2014), Campaign for Action, “The Top Five Issues For Nursing In 2015”. Available at: campaignfornursing.org/news/top-five-issues-nursing-2015. Accessed December 30, 2014.

2. Cathy Weselby,(October 2014), “5 Current Trends For Nurses In 2015”, Wilkes University. Available at: onlinenursing.wilkes.edu/trends-in-nursing. Accessed December 20, 2014.

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