

2012

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As nurses, we know that access to health care does not make a society healthy; it is individuals living conditions that primarily determine health and well-being. The word poverty has come to represent the living conditions that seriously threaten health and well-being. Poverty is a primary cause of disease, illness, and shortened life expectancy. More and more research is showing that poverty is not due to failings of the individual, but rather reflects the general operation of the economy, which is influenced by politics. Poverty rates reflect how a nation addresses key public policy issues of income distribution, employment security, working conditions, housing, income, and food security. Poverty can be reduced by building social and political movements that will force elected leaders and policy-makers to enact public policies that reduce the incidence of poverty through action on the social determinants of health.

The CNA code of ethics states that is nurse's ethical responsibility to enable people to attain their highest possible level of health and well-being and that we are to safeguard human rights, equity and fairness by promoting the wellness of the public. We are to make fair decisions about the allocation of resources under our control based on the needs of our clients. It is time for the nursing profession to start working on the unequal distribution of resources on a national and global scale instead of an individual level to make our communities and countries a more equitable and healthy place to live.

The Canadian Nursing Students Association is contributing to a world with equitable access to financial resources to the world's poorest of the poor by initiating a national nursing student fundraising campaign where the proceeds are going to the Foundation of International Community Assistance (FINCA). FINCA provides small loans to the world's lowest-income entrepreneurs so they can create jobs, build assets, and improve their standard of living. These loans allow individuals to develop and grow their own business, increase their income, purchase more nutritious foods, seek out better housing and send their children to school; all of which contribute to healthy communities.

If you would like to help CNSA in their mission of raising \$5000 for FINCA you can follow the link to donate:

<http://finca.kintera.org/faf/donorReg/donorPledge.asp?ievent=1035077&lis=1&kntae1035077=538B0A73E1C04C13A99027E451E7E490&supId=367681697>

Amanda Schneider
Director of International Health
Canadian Nursing Students Association

May 2012

Followership is often viewed as a negative term as it is easy to think being a follower has to do with obeying orders, conforming to what another person wants, and lacking the confidence in one's own ability to critically think. Followership is much more complex and is of value in nursing. Followership complements leadership; they are interdependent and must exist in harmony to enhance competence and effectiveness within a group. This is important in nursing as we work interprofessionally with other health care professionals.

As students, we are thrown into positions of followership every time we enter the clinical setting. We look to our preceptors as mentors who guide our learning. Though we demonstrate our competency and independence, our preceptor grounds us, supports us, answers our questions, and graces us with their expertise. Administering medication or starting IV lines can become simple tasks with practice, but so can becoming a bystander. What is more difficult about nursing is stepping outside of the bystander role and becoming an activist for your patients and their health. We utilize evidence based practice when providing care and reflect on previous experiences to guide future care. The roles of leadership and followership have drastically changed as leaders are considered servants to their followers while followers are responsible to exercise critical judgments in their roles. Although our roles as students are dependent and limited, our contributions are instrumental to improving patient care. We are able to learn not only from our preceptor's positive experiences, their mistakes, and our own mistakes. Mistakes allow us the ability to grow as nurses, to reflect on what we would do better or different in the future, and ultimately to learn. Being a follower is also about knowing when to lead. Being able to unite as students as one voice is paramount as it gives us the chance to find confidence and courage to speak truth to power.

Being an effective follower is not about following orders in response to a hierarchy. A challenge of leadership-followership is when it is appropriate to lead and when and who to follow. The worst thing to have is a cowardly nurse who gives up. Nurses hold people's lives in their hands and hesitating to act can lead to disastrous outcomes. Speak up and work together to be advocates for positive changes.

If you have any questions or comments, I would love to hear from you!

Laura Gallant

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April 2012

Mental illnesses are mental health disorders that are characterized by alterations in a variety of factors including mood and affect, behaviour, thinking, and cognition. Having a mental illness is a very significant challenge that is difficult to cope with. Rather than making things easier for these individuals, society has a tendency to make life more difficult. It's no wonder that mental illness is hidden. Society

has created a sense of shame, embarrassment, and humiliation toward individuals who manage mental illnesses. People are uncomfortable to talk about it, act awkward around those who experience these difficulties, and end up isolating those who may need support the most. Mental illnesses are not just a phase or a problem that can simply be solved by putting your mind to it; it is a disability that encompasses a person. Just as you would not ignore a person with a serious medical disorder, you should also not ignore a person with a mental disorder; mental illnesses are still health problems and deserve to be treated as such. No illness defines a human being; however, society continues to label individuals with mental health concerns. It is vital that the human being is always addressed before the illness, not as the illness. Every human being is valuable and worthwhile; having a mental illness is only one aspect of a person, but does not define who they are. A major factor in society that affects the image of mental health through misperception, lack of education, and media is stigma.

Stigma is a serious issue in mental health because there are only negative perceptions associated with having a mental health issue. This needs to change. Stigma is a problem of knowledge, ignorance, attitude, prejudice, behaviour, and discrimination. It is a mark separating individuals from one another based on a social judgment where some people or groups are tainted as less than or below others. It leads to negative beliefs, the endorsement of those negative stereotypes as real, and a desire to avoid or exclude persons who hold stigmatized statuses. Stigma can cause debilitating effects for its victims because they may feel as if they have no one to turn to for fear of discrimination. This is an unacceptable method of treatment toward any human being which can result in severe consequences to those who manage mental illnesses. These walls and barriers need to be brought down so individuals who manage mental illnesses are able to get the due help they need. Negative perceptions of mental health need to be combatted with positive education and awareness for the purpose of eliminating stigma. The stigma surrounding mental health should be something society works to combat together to make our world a more accepting and supportive place to live in.

We need to uncover the myths and stereotypes associated with mental health, we need to acknowledge mental health, and we need to be open to change.

If you have any questions or comments, I would love to hear from you!

Laura Gallant

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March 2012

Hello,

My name is Frédéric Laurens. I am a nursing student (NS) in my last year at McGill University. I am also part of the Canadian Nursing Student Association (CNSA) Board of Director as the Quebec Regional Director for 2011-2012.

It looks good to write a title using the words “Director” and “Board of Directors”. It sounds important and gives you the feeling to know who I am. But the only thing that is important and that matter to me is that I am a NS. Titles do not make me who I am. My stages experiences and my experience of leadership with CNSA made me the NS that I am now.

I started my studies with no particular goal. I wanted to enjoy life and at the end of my study I wanted to go work and save people. But my stage experiences brought me in a different direction and changed my vision. My desire to save people changed for a desire to care for people at the end of their life. Palliative care opened to me. How did I end up there? The answer is simple. I am an observer, I learn from human contact, and I am open to all possibilities and life experiences. In a way, I think it is life that brought me to be a nurse... I am sure that school played a role in it.

My position on the board of Directors of CNSA was offered to me. People saw qualities in me that I was not aware of or too afraid to use at that moment. Someone told me one day that we should never say no to opportunities that are offered to us. Maybe it will finish by a failure, but in each case a new experience is created and it is all those experiences that make you grow as an individual. If we always stay in our comfort zone, nobody would be able to use their full potential. So I accepted the position and learned from it, about nursing in Canada, and about myself therefore making me evolve as NS.

I hope to keep moving in this way and to keep accepting all opportunities that are offered to me. If there is none, I will just create one. I wish that all my NS colleagues be careful to not closing doors that they work so hard to open during their studies as they are graduating and entering the field of practice. Be aware to not fall in the crack of the system. You are bringing new ideas and different perspectives; put them forward. To my future RN colleagues, I hope that when you are receiving a newbie on your unit that it reminds you why you choose that profession when you were younger. If that is not the case, it is maybe time for a change and takes on new challenges. Do not forget that the field of nursing is huge and very diversified. It is not the opportunities that are missing.

Stay open to the life and to live new experiences. This can bring you far. I did not say anything new in here. We are all aware of it, but it is always good to be told again.

Frédéric Laurens, NS.

February 2012

The last week of January is always an exciting time for nursing students in Canada. Before the chaos and stress of midterms and papers set in, we have the chance to participate in one of the greatest professional development opportunities available to students: The Canadian Nursing Students' Association's National Conference. From January 25-28th, 2012, over 500 nursing students from across the country came together in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan to take part in the 2012 National Conference which was centered on the theme, “Overcoming Challenges: Harmonizing our Voices.”

National Conference is a busy and exciting four days which includes opening ceremonies, incredible guest speakers, exceptional workshops, a charity auction, meetings of the Regional Executives, meetings of the National Assembly, our annual elections for the Board of Director Positions , and a closing banquet. Additionally, this year, our conference coincided with an important announcement from the regulatory bodies that the CRNE will be replaced by an exam developed by an American company in 2015. Since the initial announcement in December, the CNSA Board of Directors has heard an outpouring of concerns from students across the country. This issue is evidently something that students are passionate about, and as the national voice of nursing students, we felt National Conference would be the perfect time to take action. In the days preceding National Conference, the board was working at a fever pitch to draft a petition and design postcards that represented the students' concerns, which would be mailed to provincial and federal governments, and the regulatory bodies. The response we received was overwhelming! Conference delegates were eager to sign the petition and a postcard, and all of our Official and Associate Delegates brought back petitions to their schools to be signed by students who were not at the conference. In the few weeks since conference, I have received numerous emails and messages from students across Western Canada asking how they can make their voice heard on this issue. To end the week, we held a media event in Saskatoon. Hundreds of students from across the country came together to sign petitions and post cards, listen to the CNSA President speak on the issue, ask questions, and voice concerns. Our event was featured on Global News Saskatoon, and we were ecstatic with the positive response. This issue was such a powerful reminder of the importance of advocating as a profession and the difference we can make when we use our collective nursing student voice. In keeping with our conference theme, we truly were able to overcome a challenging situation by harmonizing our voices.

For me, National Conference serves as a strong reminder as to why I initially decided to enter the profession of nursing. The energy and passion for making a difference and being the best nurse imaginable is infectious, and it is impossible not to walk away from the conference feeling inspired. When I looked out at the conference centre packed with my peers, I am filled with a passion to make a difference in my profession, and I realize how fortunate I am to be a part of such an incredible group of individuals who will be the nurses of tomorrow.

If you have any questions or comments, I would love to hear from you!

Maggie Danko

Western Regional Director, CNSA 2011-12

3rd Year BScN Student