

A Celebration Like No Other

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Welcome to a new year. Bet you forgot 2020 was the International Year of the Nurse and Midwife. Shining the spotlight on nurses did not work out exactly as planned. In 2020, conferences were moved to virtual. Celebratory events were scaled back. Gatherings of joy vanished. Media features highlighting nurse innovations and good works were crowded out by pandemic news.

Ah yes, the pandemic. Nurses made the news all right. Nurses, faces hidden behind masks, donned head to toe in yellow isolation garb, glasses fogged, stepping in front of cameras searching for words to describe the situation in which they now work. Caring for patients, supporting families, and championing team members. Stunned to find they were managing FaceTime calls between dying patients and shocked family members. Staying late to be present at a bedside so no one died alone. Front-seat witnesses to the unfolding horror. Pleading with the public to take the pandemic seriously and follow public health measures. Ever the grassroots leaders in health education.

For every nurse in the intensive care unit, many more are engaged out of the camera shot, covering units and clinics as staffing shuffled and assignments changed. Nurse executives and front-line managers are all keeping services moving. Advanced practice nurses are flexing from usual duties. Retirees are coming forward to lend a hand. Faculty are modifying learning

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experiences; students are adjusting to assignment changes. Nurses remain an omnipresent dependable healthcare workforce and stalwart force for health.

As a reminder of just how much a force for health nurses are, and how deep this tradition goes in our profession, read an account of nurses' service in the 1918 influenza pandemic. Keeling¹ describes the profession's ability to respond to the emergency on the home front during the Great War. Get organized, apply hygiene principles, and deliver comfort measures. In the absence of medications and vaccines, the basics still stand. Grit and courage, although rarely discussed, were as necessary then as now.

Dedication and courage are no substitute for best practices that keep nurses safe in delivering care. The International Council of Nurses published an important report—*Protecting Nurses from COVID-19* (available at https://www.icn.ch/system/files/documents/2020-09/Analysis_COVID-19%20survey%20feedback_14.09.2020.pdf). The report includes 7 recommendations for keeping nurses safe. They are the following:

1. Implement standardized data collection on nurses and all healthcare worker infections and deaths.
2. Recognize COVID-19 exposure in the workplace as an occupational illness.
3. Ensure sufficient provision of appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) and evidence-based infection prevention and control.
4. Training for nurses and workers in all healthcare settings.
5. Commit to a zero-tolerance approach to violence and discrimination against nurses and other healthcare workers.

6. Prioritize nurses and other healthcare workers for COVID-19 vaccines.
7. Ensure nurses and healthcare workers have access to and are prioritized for COVID-19 testing.
8. Scale up measures to provide mental health support and counseling resources to nurses and other healthcare workers.

The year 2020 may be gone and, as the designated Year of the Nurse and Midwife, not celebrated as planned. In answering the call to care in a worldwide pandemic, nurses have much to be proud of. As 2021 rolls around, much remains to be done. The International Council of Nurses recommendations are a start. The deaths were too many, including too many nurses taken by the virus. As of now, there is no accurate account of the number of nurses stricken by COVID-19. Ms Nightingale, a champion of data, might be appalled. In the meantime, if you know a nurse who passed because of COVID-19, consider submitting their name to the American Nurses Association at <https://www.nursingworld.org/ana/about-ana/covid-fallen-form-holder/> so their lives may be celebrated. 2020 was a year like no other, and it is not over yet.

Reference

1. Keeling AW. “Alert to the necessities of the emergency”: U.S. nursing during the 1918 influenza pandemic. *Public Health Rep.* 2010;29(suppl 3):105–112.