



## Year of the Nurse and the Midwife – 2020

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*“If a nurse declines to do these kinds of things for her patient ‘because it is not her business’, I should say that nursing was not her calling.” Florence Nightingale (Mdrut, 2020)*

Two hundred years after the birth of Florence Nightingale the World Health Organization honors nursing worldwide by celebrating nursing care and its impact on patients, families, organizations, and ultimately health care. Florence would be proud of the accomplishments nursing has made in the last two hundred years and would revel in the fact that for the last eighteen of those years, nurses have been named the most trusted profession.

In my opinion, and I believe in Nightingale’s vision, the role of an advocate in nursing is one of the most heralded characteristics and outstanding roles of nursing today. In this brief article I would like to outline what advocacy looks like from the basic relationship with the patient and family, to the overarching view of how to advocate at the legislative level, and globally.

At the most basic level nurses for two hundred years have been and continue to advocate for patients and families on a day to day basis. I have seen first-hand, as many of us have, that patients that don’t have an advocate may have a tendency to get lost in the cracks of health care. Nurses know the wants, desires, and needs of patients and begin to form relationships through therapeutic partnerships with patients on admission. It’s our mission and outlined in our code of ethics (Provision 3), that our goal is to put the patient first and always have their best interest in the forefront of all we do. Provision 3 of the ANA Code of Ethics states “The nurse promotes, advocates for, and protects the rights, health, and safety of the patient,” (Fowler, 2015).

Nurses care for patients that may not have a voice, either because of understanding, coherency, language barriers, or because of effects of treatments or medication, or the disease processes. Our advocacy is essential in making sure the patient’s desires are carried out and that our voice becomes theirs in times when they need or want to communicate and cannot.

Advocacy at the unit/department level is exhibited by involvement in not only patient care, but the structures and processes involved to improve care. Nurses must get involved at the unit level by getting involved with decision making bodies at the unit level. Advocacy at the unit level means joining councils and committees. Advocacy can be seen in taking part in orienting new nurses and student nurses. Nurse advocacy means we are involved in collaborative care involving our interprofessional partners and other departments.

At the organizational level, nurses advocate for patient care by participating in organization wide councils and committees. Nurses advocate at the organizational level by participating in policy review, utilizing evidence-based practice, and taking part in organizational educational opportunities. Another example of advocacy can be seen in adding to nursing’s body of knowledge. Nurses involved in research are advocating for the betterment of patient care and sharing that knowledge is beneficial for all of health.

Finally advocating for health care means that as nurses we are present at the legislative level. We understand and weigh in on health care bills and provide our expertise when needed at the legislative level. Nurses need to be politically active and take action when needed to be a voice for our patients and the provision of health care regarding national health care initiatives.

Advocacy in nursing starts with our patients and families and goes beyond the walls of our organizations. Nurses have the opportunity to advocate globally as they become involved in international nursing organizations, and volunteer internationally to make health and health care better throughout the world. Nurses are advocates for health care when they stay current with educational opportunities, when they advance their education, and when they become certified in a specialty. They are advocates for health care when they mentor and coach other nurses.

Advocacy for patients and families, and healthcare has become engrained in the role of the nurse. As we celebrate nurses this year, I encourage all nurses to reflect on the richness that advocating for patients brings to our role and how it has shaped the essence of nursing practice. What does it mean to step in, lean in, stand up, and be the person who supports the patient, sometimes in opposition of family members, other care providers, or organizational policies? What does it take and how will we as a profession make sure the next generation of nurses knows that advocacy is synonymous with nursing practice? What actions will we take moving forward to advocate for each and every patient? And how will we ensure that the general public understands what nurses do, their advocacy, and their critical presence in healthcare that enhances patient outcomes?

## References

Fowler, M. (2015). *Guide to the Code of Ethics for Nurses with Interpretive Statements*. Silver Springs : American Nurses Association.

Mdrut, F. (2020, Jan 18). *13 Inspirational Florence Nightingale Quotes to Nurse Your Soul*. Retrieved from [www.goalcast.com](http://www.goalcast.com): [www.goalcast.com/2018/02/08/inspirational-florence-nightingale-quotes](http://www.goalcast.com/2018/02/08/inspirational-florence-nightingale-quotes)

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