

“Nurses - Make the Difference”

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All in our nursing profession can be very proud that nursing has been the most trusted profession for the past 22 years (Brennan & Jones, 2024). Trust as defined by Oxford is “a firm belief in the reliability, truth, ability or strength of someone or something”. That’s why “Nurses Make THE Difference”.

Another belief is the “art of nursing” which was first mentioned in *Notes on Nursing: What It Is and What it is Not* by Florence Nightingale, published in 1859. Words like healing, caring, and mothering were often associated with the “art of nursing”. Florence revised the meaning of “nursing” to include concepts of assisting in the reparative process, nursing the well and incorporating cleanliness, nutrition, and fresh air.

Fast-forward to 2021 when American Nurses Association (ANA) 4th edition of *Nursing Scope and Standards of Practice* (2021) was published. It includes the following:

“The art of nursing is demonstrated by unconditionally accepting the humanity of others, respecting their need for dignity and worth, while providing compassionate, comforting care” (p.5).

It is not just the art of nursing alone that makes the difference, but the art and science of nursing based upon the nursing process. Because nurses are continuously assessing, caring for, and evaluating patients, the main difference they

make is that they see the whole patient, beyond a single body system, disease, treatment, or medication. Nurses care for patients’ families as well. They use the art and science of nursing to make THE difference.

But, what about nurses? How can nurses make the difference for themselves and the profession? How can they get beyond the day to day and follow their passions for the nursing profession and personal career goals? There are many avenues.

One critical way is through Nursing Continuing Professional Development. Accredited courses, conferences, enduring materials, and skill demonstrations are available in various settings in-person and on-line. Any of these can be taken to further enhance knowledge and skills in a current area of practice, or a new area of interest. It can be the first step to making the difference and opening new areas of growth. This coincides with our commitment to “ongoing professional learning” as noted in the 4th edition of Association for Nursing and Professional Development (ANPD)s *Nursing Professional Development Scope and Standards of Practice* (2022).

Becoming certified in an area of expertise can be a method to make the difference in a professional career path. The American Nurses Credentialing Center offers Registered Nurse (RN) and Advanced Practice Registered Nurse (APRN) certifications along several tracks such as mental health, gerontology, ambulatory care, nurse executive, nursing professional development among many others.

Another route is to further academic education. Numerous colleges and universities provide education in various formats and lengths of time for the convenience of the learner, whether seeking

a Baccalaureate, Masters, or Doctoral degree. In addition to learning, advancement in education can open many practice doors that allow a trajectory to many career paths.

Paramount is joining and actively participating in professional nursing associations. Such participation can expand nurses’ perceptions of nursing practice and visions for the future of the profession. The collegiality of nurses with the same interests, issues, and commitment to nursing can be reassuring and inspiring, moving toward the development of innovations that make the difference for an individual nurse and the profession.

Policymaking and advocacy for nurses and patients at any level can rally passion and enthusiasm within us which can make the difference. There are many opportunities to become involved at organizational, local, or national levels. As noted in the *Nursing Scope and Standards of Practice*, we are still striving to “unconditionally accept the humanity of others, respecting their need for dignity and worth.” The ANA 2024 Regulatory and Policy Priorities (2024) are focused on those principles. The priorities are:

- Ensuring and protecting a robust nursing workforce,
- Advancing and addressing health equity,
- Removing practice barriers for advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs), and
- Shaping payment strategies to highlight nursing’s direct impact on optimal patient outcomes (para. 2).

At our New Mexico (NM) state level, the New Mexico Nurses Association (NMNA) priorities parallel ANA priorities. Our top issues are health access and equity, staffing safely, decreasing workplace violence *now*, and allowing

APRNs to practice at the level of their education. Nurses make the difference every year during the NM legislative session through their direct advocacy. To address and achieve our priorities, during the 2024 legislative session NMNA lobbied and gained increased funding for student loan repayment for nurses, rural tax credit for nurses, and pay equity for Nurse Practitioners under Medicaid.

A “robust nursing workforce” does not only include appropriate and sufficient staffing levels, but also a reduction in workforce violence. “Health equity” encompasses access to unbiased healthcare. “Removing practice barriers” for APRNs to practice at their level of education has been a long-standing challenge. Through hard work and persistence of advocate nurses in 1993, New Mexico was among the first five states to allow Nurse Practitioners to have independent practice. Across our state, APRNs provide care to many of our rural populations who would not have access to care without them. There still remain many unnecessary restrictions in practice and discriminations in reimbursement and credentialing. Nurses will make the difference in “shaping payment strategies” with changes to federal regulations that do not incorporate the value of nursing at all levels. Nurses are at the front line of preventing harmful patient outcomes and rescuing patients whose conditions are worsening in the acute care setting. Positions in primary care, care coordination, community health, and long-term care facilities are just a few places where nurses play a significant role, but reimbursement for nursing care is still built into the room rate. Nurses, make the difference by obtaining your unique National Provider Identifier (NPI). Although it may not be required in your current position, having one can be beneficial in the future for independent practice or billing for services. To apply, visit the National Plan and Provider Enumeration System (NPPES) website at <https://nppes.cms.hhs.gov>.

These issues are key to our nursing profession, have been around for decades and require nursing participation and action now.

At the organizational level, nurses can shape policies that recognize our profession. Shared governance, participation in nursing, interprofessional, quality, and leadership committees and escalating care through evidence-based practice are just a few ways to improve patient outcomes. As nurses, you are there and know first-hand what others may not know, and because of your trustworthiness, it is part of your role to contribute data and potential patient and organizational impacts through policymaking.

During May, when nurses are honored, please take a moment to realize what you do to make the professional difference for yourself. Reflect on your many accomplishments and achievements over this past year. Continue to consider how to make the difference for the profession in New Mexico. ■

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