

# Be the Change: Advocating for Compassionate Care in Healthcare

Author: Quoida Lauzon, RN

As medical professionals, we hold a profound responsibility to advocate for our patients and provide compassionate, clear, and thorough care. Yet, many of us have experienced moments when, due to time constraints, stress, or burnout, we may unintentionally fall short. Having been both a nurse and a patient, I've seen firsthand the stark contrast between exemplary care and care that leaves patients feeling dismissed or confused. These experiences remind us of the critical importance of patient advocacy and the role we play in transforming healthcare for the better.

## The Patient Experience: Why Listening Matters

Recently, I found myself on the other side of the healthcare system as a patient, asking a respiratory therapist questions about testing procedures. Instead of receiving the clarity and reassurance I sought, I was met with visible frustration, which left me feeling unheard and uneasy. At one point, an induced asthma attack was triggered during testing, feeling short of breath and lightheaded, I was left alone after receiving 5 puffs of albuterol. It was only after speaking with the doctor and voicing my concerns that I felt a little more hopeful that changes could be implemented to improve safety and patient communication.

This experience highlights a recurring issue in healthcare: patients' questions are sometimes perceived as challenges rather than opportunities to educate and empower. When patients seek understanding, they are exercising their right to informed consent and participation in their care. As professionals, it is our duty to honor that right by slowing down, listening, and ensuring clarity.

## Creating Change as Medical Professionals

As nurses and healthcare providers, we often witness the systemic pressures that lead

to rushed care and miscommunication. But instead of accepting these shortcomings as inevitable, we must commit to being the change we want to see. Here are practical ways we can foster positive transformation:

1. Be an Advocate for Patients and Peers
  - Listen Actively: Pay attention to patients' concerns without rushing them. Provide clear explanations, especially when they are anxious or confused. Look at and also listen to the patient not just the machines.
  - Speak Up: When you witness unsafe practices or unprofessional behavior, address it constructively. This could involve providing feedback to colleagues, reporting to supervisors, or offering suggestions for improvement.
2. Foster a Culture of Teamwork
  - Tag Team for Better Care: If you notice a colleague struggling, offer to step in and help, even if it's just for a moment. A fresh perspective can improve outcomes and prevent misunderstandings.
  - Encourage Collaboration: Multidisciplinary collaboration ensures that patients receive well-rounded, cohesive care.
3. Address Burnout and Its Impact
  - Prioritize Self-Care: Burnout can impair our ability to connect with patients. Institutions should provide resources like counseling, flexible scheduling and stress management workshops, staff appreciation days, to support staff. Us as caregivers need to be taken care of too.
  - Advocate for Safe Staffing: Advocate for adequate staffing levels, as high patient loads often compromise the quality of care.
4. Combat Discrimination and Bias
  - Promote Equity in Care: Acknowledge and address unconscious biases in yourself and your workplace. Treat ev-

ery patient with dignity, regardless of their background.

- Educate and Train: Participate in training programs focused on cultural competence and anti-discrimination.
5. Engage in Continuous Learning
    - Join Advocacy Groups: Organizations like the American Nurses Association (ANA) and local hospital committees offer platforms to drive policy changes and share best practices.
    - Educate and Mentor: Share your knowledge with peers and students to inspire a culture of excellence and empathy.

## The Role of Leadership: Leading by Example

True transformation in healthcare starts at the top. Strong, compassionate, and hands-on leadership has the power to inspire entire teams and set a standard of care that prioritizes patient safety, teamwork, and staff well-being. Leaders who take an active role in understanding and supporting their teams can foster environments where everyone—staff and patients alike—feels valued.

## How Leaders Can Be the Change

1. Get on the Floor
  - Leaders should regularly spend time on the floors alongside their teams, observing, asking questions, and lending a hand when needed. This not only builds trust but also provides a real-time understanding of the challenges staff face.
  - Simple acts like helping with patient care during a busy shift or stepping in during a crisis can demonstrate empathy and a commitment to teamwork.
2. Ask, Listen, Act
  - Proactively ask team members what they need to succeed and create safe spaces for open dialogue.

- Act on feedback to implement meaningful changes, whether it's addressing workflow inefficiencies, improving staff-to-patient ratios, or enhancing resources.
3. Prioritize Education and Growth
    - Leaders should continue their own education on patient safety, cultural competence, and burnout prevention. A leader who models lifelong learning encourages others to do the same.
    - Offer training programs and mentorship opportunities to empower employees to grow professionally and personally.
  4. Treat Staff with Respect and Care
    - When leadership is strong, kind, and supportive, it sets the tone for the entire organization. Treating team members with dignity trickles down to how they treat each other as well as their patients.
    - Recognize and celebrate staff contributions, no matter how small. Acknowledgment fosters morale and shows employees they are valued members of the team.
  5. Address Burnout and Advocate for Well-Being
    - Leaders must actively combat burn-

out by promoting work-life balance, offering mental health support, and advocating for manageable workloads. Burnout among healthcare workers doesn't just affect them—it directly impacts the quality of patient care.

- Create initiatives like wellness days, flexible scheduling, or peer-support programs to help staff recharge and feel supported.
6. Lead with Transparency and Accountability
    - Admit when mistakes are made, whether by individuals or the organization, and take responsibility for correcting them. This builds a culture of trust where employees feel safe raising concerns without fear of retaliation.
    - Set measurable goals for improving patient outcomes, staff satisfaction, and organizational performance, and involve the team in achieving these goals.

### Changing the System Together

Healthcare professionals at all levels—front-line staff and leadership alike—must work together to create meaningful change. This requires a culture of mutual respect, accountability, and constant learning. By being patient advocates, supporting one another, and

fostering compassionate leadership, we can transform healthcare into a system that prioritizes safety, understanding, and excellence.

As professionals, we must remember: the changes we want to see in the world of healthcare begin with us. Whether it's taking an extra moment to answer a patient's questions, stepping in to help a colleague in need, or advocating for systemic improvements, every action counts.

Let's be the advocates our patients deserve. Let's be the supportive colleagues our teams need. Let's be the leaders who inspire others to rise to their full potential. Let's be the change we want to see.

Quoida Lauzon, RN, is a nurse, writer, and advocate for compassionate healthcare. She uses her experiences as both a nurse and a patient to inspire change and promote equity, patient safety, and staff well-being within the healthcare system. Find her at [www.EPESprogram.com](http://www.EPESprogram.com) she coaches new parents on parental leave as well as helps nurses reach financial freedom. ■

## Nurses House

**Nurses House Inc.** held its annual fundraiser walk at the ANA-NY Conference in Lake George on October 23rd. We wish to thank all ANA-NY members who attended and contributed to the fundraiser which raised \$4,147 for nurses in need. We are grateful to ANA-NY for their continued support of our mission.

The original Nurses House in Babylon, Long Island opened its doors in January of 1925. Nurses House has been celebrating our centennial since June of 2024 and the celebration will run through June of 2025. Those who donate \$100 or more will be honored on a centennial plaque and sweatshirts and cross body bags with our centennial logo are available for a \$65 or \$35 donation. To make a donation to the centennial campaign simply visit [nurseshouse.org](http://nurseshouse.org) and click on the centennial page. All donations will go towards our grant program which provides help with housing expenses to RNs in need due to illness or injury.



If you or a nurse you know are struggling financially due to a serious medical condition, please visit the apply for help page on our website to apply. ■