

From the Editor-in-Chief

Year of the Nurse: Celebrating the 200th Anniversary of the Birth of Florence Nightingale

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In 2020 – designated world-wide as the Year of the Nurse – we celebrate the 200th anniversary of the birth of Florence Nightingale on May 12. This seems particularly appropriate with nurses around the globe currently serving heroically on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic, given that Nightingale’s reputation and influence were born in the infection-ridden hospitals of the Crimea.

When she and her 40 nurses arrived in Scutari in November 1854, she found a dilapidated Barrack Hospital (a quadrangle building with four floors, one-half mile long on each side); scarce medical supplies, linens, and food; unsanitary conditions; a vermin infestation; a contaminated water supply; and a medical staff leader who did not see the need for nurses. The hospital housed thousands of wounded British soldiers, many with infections and diseases, such as cholera, dysentery, and gangrene. Nightingale and her team went to work – ridding the hospital of filth, pests, and piles of amputated body parts and providing care for their patients. From day one, Nightingale recorded data on patients’ wounds, their diseases, and their deaths, and the problems with the building and supplies. She shared that information in hundreds of letters to leaders back in England, requesting assistance. When she returned home from the Crimea 21 months later, hospital conditions and the mortality rate had greatly improved, and the image of nurses was forever transformed, but Nightingale herself felt there was still much work left to be done. The rest of her life was devoted to educating nurses and reforming health care.

Over her career, Nightingale served in many roles, including as nurse, author, innovator, statistician, visionary, patient care administrator, collaborator, educator, architect, communicator, reformer, and leader. From instructions on the most basic nursing care to her political intrigue to improve the health care of nations, Nightingale left a wonderful and inspirational legacy for nurses and the nursing profession. Many of her words and experiences are as relevant and inspirational today as they were over 100 years ago.

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Statue of Florence Nightingale, London, England. Photo by Beth Ulrich, NNJ Editor-in-Chief.



LEAD • INNOVATE • EXCEL





In 2003, I had a very special experience. I was privileged to visit Florence Nightingale's family home at Embley. I got to walk through parts of the house including the library (pictured above) where her father educated Florence and her sister himself (in a time when only men were allowed in colleges); I sat on a bench under the same cedar trees where Florence believed she heard her calling to be a nurse; and I visited the family chapel and her burial site that has a very modest marker. *Beth Ulrich, NNJ Editor-in-Chief*

In the Words of Florence Nightingale

Progress

For us who Nurse, our Nursing is a thing, which, unless in it we are making progress every year, every month, every week, take my word for it, we are going back. The more experience we gain, the more progress we can make.

Change Agents

There are two classes of people in the world – those who take the best and enjoy it, and those who wish for something better and try to create it. The world needs the appreciation of the first and the discontent of the second.

A Warning

The world, more especially the hospital world, is in such a hurry and is moving so fast that it is too easy to slide into bad habits before we are aware.

Hospitals

A hospital is good for the seriously ill alone – otherwise, it becomes a lodging-house where the nervous become more nervous, the foolish more foolish, the idle and selfish more selfish and idle.

It may seem a strange principle to enunciate as the very first requirement in a Hospital that it should do the sick no harm. It is quite necessary nevertheless to lay down such a principle, because the actual mortality in hospitals, especially those in large crowded cities, is very much higher than any calculation founded on the mortality of the same class of patient treated out of hospitals would lead us to expect.

It is a rule without any exception that no patient ought ever to stay a day longer in a hospital than is absolutely essential for medical or surgical treatment.

Hospital Nursing

If there is any nonsense in people's ideas of what hospital nursing is, one day of real duty will root it out. There are things to be done and seen which at once separate the true metal from the tinkling brass both among men and women.

Values

What is our needful thing? To have high principles at the bottom of it all... If your foundation is laid on shifting sand, you may build your house, but it will tumble down.

Leadership

A person in charge must be felt more than she is heard – not heard more than she is felt... She must exert authority without appearing to exercise it.

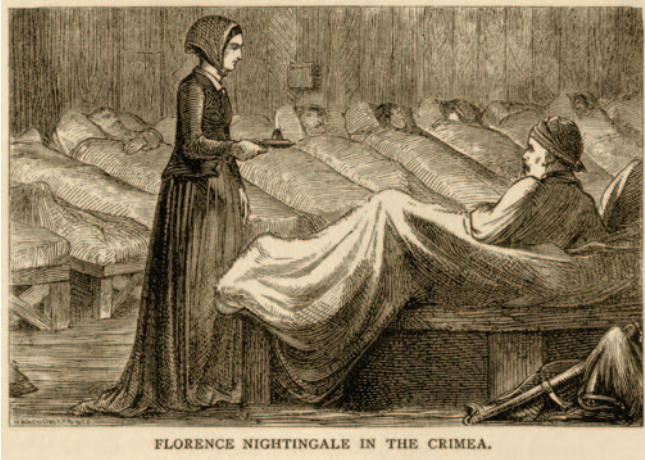
The person in charge of everyone must be seen to be just and candid, looking at both sides, not moved by entreaties or by likes and dislikes, but only by justice; and always reasonable, remembering and not forgetting the wants of those of whom she is in charge... She [the person in charge] must have a keen though generous insight into the characters of those she has to control. They must know that she cares for them even while she is checking on them; or rather that she checks on them because she cares for them. We ought to be what we want to seem, or those under us will find out very soon that we only seem what we ought to be.

What are the qualities which give us authority, which enable us to exercise some charge or control over others with 'authority?' It is not the charge or position itself, for we often see persons in a position of authority, who have no authority at all; and on the other hand, we sometimes see persons in the very humblest position who exercise a great influence or authority on all around them.

Let whoever is in charge keep this simple question in her head (not, how can I always do this right thing myself, but) how can I provide for this right thing to always be done?

Teamwork

Let us each and all realizing the importance of our influence on others – stand shoulder to shoulder – and not alone, in good cause.



Florence Nightingale working at Scutari military hospital in the Crimea, during the Crimean War (1853-56). From "Aunt Charlotte's Stories of English History for the Little Ones" by Charlotte M Yonge. Published by Marcus Ward & Co, London & Belfast, in 1884. Source: iStock.



NNJ Editor-in-Chief Beth Ulrich was granted the honor of holding Florence Nightingale's lamps when she visited the Florence Nightingale Museum in 2003. Photo courtesy of Beth Ulrich. Used with permission from the Florence Nightingale Museum.

The very essence of all good organization is that everybody should do her (or his) own work in such a way as to help and not hinder everyone else's work.

Perseverance

To our beginners good courage, to our dear old workers peace, fresh courage too, perseverance: for to persevere at the end is as difficult and needs yet better energy than to begin new work.

Interruptions

I have never known persons who exposed themselves for years to constant interruptions who did not muddle away their intellects at last.

Patients won't wait to die, or better, to be made to live, and operations won't wait till I am less in a hurry.

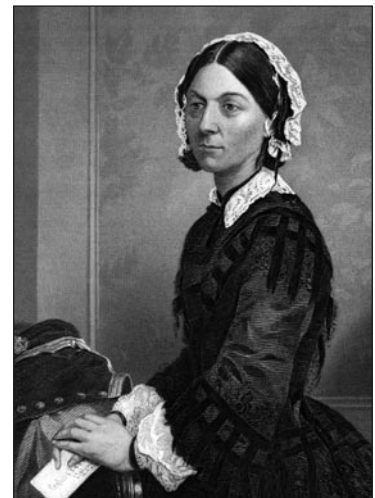
No Excuses

I attribute my success to this: I never gave or took an excuse. Yes, I do see the difference now between me and other men. When a disaster happens, I act and they make excuses.

Learning

She [the nurse] may have gone to a first rate course – plenty of examinations. And we may find nothing inside. It may be the difference between a nurse nursing and a nurse reading a book on nursing. Unless it bear fruit, it is all gilding and veneering; the reality is not there, growing, growing every year. Every nurse must grow. No nurse can stand still, she must go forward, or she will go backward, every year. And how can a certificate or public register show this?

Florence Nightingale (1820-1910) on an engraving by unknown artist and published in "Portrait Gallery of Eminent Men and Women with Biographies," USA, 1873. Source: iStock.



No training is of any use, unless one can learn (1) to feel, and (2) to think out things for oneself.

A good nurse will test her nursing and learn something to the last day of her nursing life. Nursing takes a whole life to learn.

Progress

No system can endure that does not march. Are we walking to the future or to the past?

Nursing

It is a noble calling, the calling of Nurses but it depends on you Nurses to make it noble.