

## From the Editor-in-Chief

# It Was the Best of Times...It Was the Worst of Times

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“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.”

– Charles Dickens



The words of Charles Dickens (1859, p. 1) seem to describe perfectly the world in which we find ourselves today. Spring of 2021 brought the best of times in a cascade of voices (and not just our own) recognizing, as *The Future of Nursing 2020-2030* report said, the “vast expertise and untapped potential of nurses at every level and in every setting” (National Academy of Medicine, 2021, p.

14). Yet in the Summer of 2021, we have been battling through the worst of times in the purgatory period of the pandemic. In an age of wisdom (and science), we determined what had to be done to conquer this virus, but we were faced with the foolishness of too many people ignoring it or not willing to do their part to ensure the health of our communities. Just when we had started to see progress and dared to hope that we could recenter ourselves and our organizations and move forward, the Delta wave appeared and threatened to drown us – because this time as hospitals fill with hallways of IV pumps connected to patients who may never see the outside world again, our frontline health care teams are exhausted and have less reserve strength to call on.

In the first surge and even in the second surge, health care workers stepped up – many putting their lives and the lives of their families at risk to care for victims of the pandemic. Nurses were called heroes and angels of mercy. The sentiment was appreciated, but many nurses felt they were just doing what they’d always done – only now the public saw it on television every night. It was hard, intense, and unrelenting work, but it was why we came into nursing. Nurses were physically tired, emotionally spent, and grieving personal and professional losses, but knowing a vaccine was coming made it feel like there could be an end to this national nightmare, if only we could hold the line until it arrived. And we did. We got a glimpse of that “season of light” as Dickens called it, but then came the darkness when far too many people did not get vaccinated.

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Now we are in the third surge, larger in many places than the first two, with hospitals once again overflowing with patients with COVID-19. But the difference this time is that the majority of these patients did not get the vaccine, which could have prevented most of their illnesses and would not have put nurses and other health care workers at unnecessary risk. As a result, many health care professionals are struggling with feelings of anger at this behavior in addition to being physically and mentally exhausted.

## Getting Through This Surge

Getting through this latest surge will be hard – it will take courage to share our voices and courage to go to work every day, resilience, leadership (from everyone), strength, innovation, caring (about ourselves, our colleagues, and our patients), the willingness to be vulnerable, self-compassion (do for yourself as you would do for others), collaboration, patience, and much more. Getting through this latest surge starts with remembering why we became nurses and all that we went through to learn what we know now and be able to be the nurses we are today. It requires taking one day at a time (and sometimes one minute or one hour at a time) – sometimes laser-focusing on the task at hand or on the person you are with, and sometimes putting your head up, using your voice, and leading others forward to the next step. It necessitates drawing on the strength and courage that we have developed as nurses. And it definitely requires taking care of ourselves and our colleagues, as well as our patients.

We will get through this. It is what we do. It is who we are. It is who we want to be.

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