Paging Nurses’ Value: Answer the Call, Pull Up a Chair, and Join the Conversation

I was left feeling encouraged after reading the refreshing take on the nursing voice as expressed in the March/April Nursing Economic$ Editorial: “Speaking Truth to Power: Implications for Nursing’s Value and Voice” (Nickitas, 2017). Often there is a pleading tone when nurses ask to be given a voice to communicate their power. Yet, in this time of personal and professional branding, there are multiple ways for us to ensure nurse voices are heard. Thanks to value-based care, speaking to our contributions in terms of data and metrics is tied to job security. People are recognized for the value they share. There is an abundance of readily available communication platforms in social media such as LinkedIn, YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter. Decision makers are participating in Tweet chats and Facebook Live events at an increasing number; joining their conversations and adding value is expected from people who have credible content to share (Conway & Knighton, 2016). People are looking at reliable content on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube as well as consuming content via podcasts. Due to the plethora of communication platforms, when someone chooses to deliver content that truly helps, it is not too hard to stand out from the rest of the chattering heads. When this value is directed to a specific audience and serves the unique needs of the audience, the communicator then is perceived as a trusted advisor. Nurses, as content experts on health care, can speak with authority on a variety of subjects and we have the power to collectively improve our community’s well-being.

Constructing a platform of authority is not a mysterious process. Training and how-to guides on personal branding are plentiful. Knowing where to start can easily be determined with a consultation with an expert; experts with a focus on healthcare professionals are not in hiding either. There is now a choice to be silent or be heard; there is also a choice to become irrelevant.

Nurses do not have a choice to withhold lifesaving information from the public wherever the audience may be found. Nurses are trusted communicators, so when we are collectively silent on topics such as vaccinations, concussions, and more, our silence sends a loud message to our community. The message our silence communicates is that nurses, the most trusted of all professions, do not feel that matters of public health are worth speaking about.

This silence may even impact public health. We are nurses 24/7. With structured training, there is the real possibility that millions of nurses could be systematically disseminating evidence-based research and general health information on a constant basis to a public that is hungry for our knowledge and wisdom. Due to the ease of communications, waiting for an “invitation to the table” may be a very long wait or worse, never come. Due to the open nature of learning and knowledge sharing afforded by social media platforms, there is an expectation those subject matter experts will “pull up a chair” and join many vibrant healthcare conversations. Waiting for someone else to value nurses enough to build a specific platform for them to display their value to improve healthcare is a hope that does not mesh with our reality of open communication.

Thank you Dr. Nickitas for encouraging nurses to see that “tools of citizen engagement and participation” (p.54) are literally in the palms of their hand.

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REFERENCES