Here is a persistent salary gap within the nursing workforce. It is both harmful and discriminatory. The job of the professional nurse regardless of healthcare setting is the same but the pay is different. Why the salary gap when male and female nurses are doing the same job? The answer seems to be gender. A new national salary research report by Nurse.com (2018) revealed that even in an industry where women have predominated for generations, male nurses earn significantly more than their female colleagues for doing same job. In the nationwide sample of 4,126 women and 394 men, men earned an average of $79,688 a year compared to an average $73,090 for female nurses; a difference of nearly $6,600 (8.2%). “Gender bias is alive and well in nursing” stated lead study author Jennifer Mensik, PhD, RN, NEA-BC, FAAN (Deam, 2018, para 13).

Data indicate an increasing proportion of men in the registered nurse workforce. Among respondents licensed prior to 2000, 5.8% were male, while of those licensed between 2013 and 2015, 14.1% were male (National Council of State Boards of Nursing [NCSBN], 2018).

Pay Inequity
Pay inequity in nursing has persisted throughout the employment history of women but now is persistent within the nursing workforce. With the newly released Nurse Salary Research Report (Nurse.com, 2018), equal pay for equal work in nursing must be a concern for the entire profession. Gender must not be the story from the research report. Pay inequity and economic discrimination is the whole story. It is time for healthcare systems to adjust salaries based on education, tenure in nursing, and certification – not gender. We must demand that human resource departments and healthcare executives address the salary gap immediately.

A 2017 National Nursing Workforce Study (NCSBN, 2018) found males average a yearly salary of $80,000 versus females at $70,000, which is an even bigger gap than reported in the Nurse.com report. Why the gap? The NCSBN study revealed men change jobs more often than women. Changing jobs gives men more opportunities to negotiate their wages on a more frequent basis. If indeed men are better at negotiating salaries, why is gender still a factor during salary negotiation? It seems female nurses are less likely to negotiate their salaries than male nurses (43% of men “most of the time or always” negotiate compared to only 34% of women [Nurse.com, 2018]). We need to a better job preparing graduate registered nurses on how to effectively negotiate salaries so nursing salaries improve for all nurses, not just male nurses.

All nurses should learn how to negotiate their salaries in advance of accepting any employment opportunity (Hilton, 2018). Do not accept a job offer without placing a counter offer on the table, no matter how much you want the job. Employers expect counter offers will be made by the new prospect. Be prepared to negotiate and have your salary number ready in hand. Education, certification, and tenure in nursing are all factors that influence negotiation power. Mensik (2018) noted that male nurses with a specialty certification had a mean salary of $81,672 and females with certification had a mean salary of $80,420. That closes the salary differential from more than $6,000 to only about a $1,000 per year.

Time for Change
It is time to ask our healthcare organizations and elected officials to address this economic discrimination within the nursing profession where there is not equal pay for equal work. The economic gender gap warrants our attention.

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What would Florence Nightingale say about the 21st century nursing workforce who are still predominately women and who are underpaid and undervalued for the same work as their male counterparts? Share and add your voice to this issue via twitter.com/NursingEcon and facebook.com/NursingEconomics. We need to eliminate gender and economic discrimination against women in nursing and close the salary gap.

REFERENCES