Journalists consistently overlook nurses as sources. In fact, nurses are quoted only 2% of the time in health news stories (Mason, Glickstein, & Westphaln, 2018). When nurses are cited, we are rarely identified as nurses. If and when we’re featured in the media, it is our care, compassion, trustworthiness, and nurturing acts that are emphasized. Of course, these are attributes that reflect the core values of our profession, but what is not being highlighted is our intellect and influence, as well as nurses’ powerful contributions to health and healthcare policymaking.

Diana J. Mason, PhD, RN, FAAN, principal investigator of The Woodhull Study Revisited (the first Woodhull Study was the seminal research project on nurse invisibility in the media), a senior policy service professor for the Center for Health Policy and Media Engagement at George Washington University, and Barbara Glickstein, MPH, MS, RN, co-investigator of The Woodhull Study Revisited, and director of communication at the Center, affirm that lack of progress in nurses’ representation in health news stories over the past 20 years is stunning. They note progress will not be made until nurses get the recognition they deserve for being a powerful force in transforming health care and promoting public health. And, they say, one of the most important ways to get this recognition is by tapping into a variety of media and making their voices heard as healthcare experts (Mason, Glickstein, Nixon et al., 2018; Mason, Nixon et al., 2018).

Nurses’ Voices and Visibility in the Media

Is 2020 the year for increasing nurses’ visibility in the public sphere through print, television, radio/podcasts, and social media? Nursing Economic$ seeks to promote a greater understanding of the power, numbers, and impact of nursing and nurses’ scope of practice throughout the 2020 International Year of the Nurse and Midwife celebrations.

Nurses must be ready to engage journalists and use a variety of media to change how we are portrayed. Can you imagine if every one of the nearly 4 million nurses in the United States was heard? You’ve all read the result of the annual Gallup Poll: The public trusts nurses more than any other profession, but they understand us the least. So, this much is clear: We need to change that and start talking. We need to educate and engage the public through all forms of print and digital media at our disposal. We must convey how our influence on improving healthcare quality and cost savings through evidence-based practice, education, research, and leadership/administration.

Journalists and the media play an important role in educating the public about issues affecting health and health care, but media biases about who are credible experts is limiting the richness of their reporting, according to Jean Johnson, PhD, RN, FAAN, executive director of the George Washington Center for Health Policy.

“If journalists aren’t interviewing nurses, they may be missing the best part of the story,” Dr. Johnson said, in a recent press release.

According to Glickstein, the issue goes two ways: While health journalists do not understand the range of nurses’ roles, we are not routinely engaging journalists either. Nurses simply must do better in 2020 to ensure the public knows and understands what nurses do. This will help reduce biases in newsrooms, which are staffed by journalists who often exclusively use doctors or other non-nurse healthcare specialists in their stories. The full picture of health care today won’t be portrayed accurately until nurses are included.

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**Editorial**

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**How Is Nursing Economic$ Helping?**

The Nursing Economic$ Editorial Board, column editors, and staff are working with our communications department to expand our media outreach. We’re building bigger databases and pitching stories to journalists. We’re sending copies of the journal to reporters, bloggers, and social media influencers. We are also encouraging journalists to use Nursing Economic$ as a resource for stories and a springboard for timely topics, such as health care and climate change, opioid abuse, and staffing issues.

**What You Can Do**

As I mentioned earlier, we are celebrating 2020 as the *International Year of the Nurse and Midwife*. It is an ideal time to ramp up our efforts to get nurses’ voices heard in the media.

Here are a few actions you can take:

- Compile directories of media-savvy nurses prepared to speak with journalists at healthcare organizations, colleges and universities, and in the community about their clinical and policy expertise.
- Work with your place of employment to develop nursing media competency.
- Speak with members of the public (friends, family, colleagues in other professions) whenever you can about nurses’ contributions and expertise.
- If you spot newsworthy research or work being done by nurses, reach out to your facility’s communications professionals and encourage them to share the information with the media.
- Alert journalists about the depth of clinical nursing expertise by writing an op-ed, a letter to the editor, an opinion piece on something you read, or an article that speaks directly to the public.
- Encourage other nurses to develop their own media competencies.

These strategies will be enhanced by progressively including policy and media content in the nursing curricula from baccalaureate to graduate programs.

Being a media-savvy nurse is an important part of your responsibility to your profession. Together, let’s broadcast the message that 2020 is the year nurses will be heard, loud and clear. $

**References**

