

2008 Great Iowa Nurses Comments

May 4, 2008

Congratulations to the 2008 Great Iowa Nurses. And, welcome to family, friends, and colleagues of today's honorees. It is my pleasure to participate in this event to honor the 2008 Great Iowa Nurses and to offer my thoughts about the significance of this event.

As I was thinking about the event and my recognition last year, it seems to me that the significance of the event is best described in three ways.

First, the event brings increased awareness to the breadth of nursing. The typical image of nursing comes from either personal experience or from the media. Usually the image formed through personal experience is from a family member or friend who is a nurse or as an experience as a patient. Those personal experiences, while important, offer only a narrow view of nursing and provide individuals a small window into the diverse field of nursing.

Nursing as portrayed by the media is usually set within a hospital. Again, this is a very narrow view of the breadth of nursing practice. As we know from the nurses honored today, nurses work in many different settings; not only hospitals, but in our communities and in our schools. They also work in many different roles—nurses at the point of care, managers, educators, counselors, patient advocates, researchers, and the list can go on and on.

This recognition event is important, as it expands the understanding of the diverse and important contributions that nurses make every day.

The second way in which this event is significant is the importance of the recognition to each of the honorees. None of us entered nursing to get recognition. We became nurses to help others and to make the space in which we live and work a little better. But, recognition is always wonderful to receive.

This recognition event is different, though. All of us, I'm sure, have received recognition, but mostly recognition from internal sources—that personal word of thanks or that letter sent to your manager or to the president of your organization. Or, it might have come as a name cited in a patient satisfaction survey or one of the many internal recognition events that all of our organizations host.

The recognition with this event is external and is public. Although those other forms of recognition are special, this event takes on a special meaning for those of you honored today by the external, public nature of the recognition.

It is recognition for your dedication to a demanding field of work. It's been said that all occupations have three components—physical, cognitive, and emotional. Some occupations are primarily characterized by the physical nature of the work with less emphasis on the cognitive or emotional. Other occupations are intellectually very demanding but not physically or emotionally demanding. Nursing is one of the few, and I believe, the only job that is intense in all three areas. Nursing is physically hard, intellectually demanding, and emotionally challenging.

And, to be recognized today for outstanding performance in this profession of nursing is an awesome accomplishment! My congratulations to each of you!

The third area of significance is sharing this time with family. I know that each of you is very appreciative that your family is here today to share this experience with you, and you know what their presence means to you. But, you may not realize what this event means to them and the impact you are having on them today as they see you recognized.

This was brought home to me just last week, as I provided the opening comments at the annual meeting of the American Organization of Nurse Executives (AONE). Not only was I standing before the audience, but my image was projected on two large screens on either side of the stage, so attendees in the back of the ballroom could also see me. Sitting in the front room was my family, including my two grandchildren—Peyton, 4 years old, and William, 1 year old. Whenever my image was up on the screen—it came and went as I was using slides to illustrate my comments—I could hear my grandchildren react. While that was a little distracting, it wasn't until later that evening that I realized the true impact my role at the meeting had. My granddaughter, Peyton, came up to me and said, "Nana, someday I'm going to be on the big TV, and I'm going to talk." What an impression I left on her, and what an impression her comments made on me!

I encourage those present today to share your thoughts about the day and the impact this event had on you with your family member who is recognized as one of the Great Iowa Nurses. The nurses honored today might not truly appreciate how much of an impact or a role model they have been or are for you and other members of your family. Don't miss this opportunity to let them know how special they are to you.

Finally, I want to close with a thought from my favorite philosophers, Dr. Seuss. While I was researching my speech for the AONE Annual Meeting, I came across a perfect closing statement for that meeting, and I also found the perfect thought for this special event. I've taken some liberty and edited this comment, though, so for those of you who are also aficionados of Dr. Seuss, forgive me.

Dr. Seuss said:

(S)he has something called VOOM.
VOOM is so hard to get.
You never saw anything like it, I bet.
Now don't ask me what VOOM is.
I never will know.
But, boy let me tell you.
It sure does show!

Don't ever lose your VOOM. It's what got you here today and what makes you special!

Thank you and congratulations!

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