Nurses' Professional Caring Presence and the Power to Affect Change

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W hat images come to mind when you think of nursing care? You might think of Lavinia Dock, Dorothea Dix, Florence Nightingale, or perhaps you think of the fictional nurse characters from movies and television series such as *Grey's Anatomy*, *Nurse Jackie*, *M*A*S*H*, and *ER* (NurseGroups.com, 2015). Regardless of what triggers your thoughts, there is the recognition that society needs professional nurses who can expertly care for others.

Nursing encompasses a broad history that spans many generations of nurses caring for the sick, injured, poor, and destitute. Early nurses were anyone who had a desire to help others, with no formal training involved. As the practice of nursing developed, many women trained to become nurses as a lifetime career, choosing to remain single to devote themselves entirely to their profession. The advances that nurses through history have made within the field of nursing have helped bring people of all different backgrounds into this important career (OnlineNursingPrograms.net, 2010).

The media's portrayal of nurses and the nursing profession affects the perception of nursing in today's health care environment. The image that you model as a professional registered nurse strongly influences the public's perception of nurses and creates a frame of reference

Abstract The image of nursing is important, and it is influenced by several factors, including the way in which nurses conduct themselves, their caring demeanor to patients and their families, and even the way they dress when providing care. The time for nurses to redefine their image is now. By working together, nurses can help others and the public see the nursing profession clearly. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.nwh.2016.02.005

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The image of nursing is important. Image influences patient safety, public policy, recruitment into the profession, and other issues that have far-reaching consequences (Kearns, 2009). Cohen and Bartholomew (2008) conducted a

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survey of 1,142 nursing professionals and identified the factors that most affect image; these included how nurses present themselves to patients and their families, whether patients and families think nurses care, how skilled nurses appear to be at their jobs, how nurses act around areas such as the nurses' station, and how nurses dress. Many of these factors are related to communication and how nurses demonstrate caring to their patients and families in verbal and non-verbal ways.

A Historical Perspective

The origins of nursing can be traced back centuries; however, the professional image of nursing is thought to have begun with Florence Nightingale, also known as the "lady with the lamp." Many consider her the founder of modern nursing as we know it today and responsible for the major transformation of the image of nursing. Once Florence Nightingale brought respectability to the nursing profession, a new image of the nurse began to appear. Nurses were portrayed as noble, moral, religious, virginal, ritualistic, and self-sacrificing (Kalisch & Kalisch, 1983).

Nightingale believed that one of the keys to define the nursing profession was training and education, which during the mid- to late-1800s was a privilege granted mainly to men. Her work, which drew positive media coverage, was instrumental in helping her establish the first training school for nurses in London in 1859 (Reverby, 1998). That positive image of the "lady with the lamp" has prevailed throughout history and is still reflected in today's celebrations and ceremonies involving nursing.

In the United States, the Civil War greatly influenced the development of nursing as a profession, and there were many women who helped forge the image of nursing during this time. The work they performed changed the public's perception of work by women outside

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