

Inspirational message from CNA president-elect to community health nurses

Written by Alison DeLory on May 19, 2011

Barbara Mildon implores members to become involved in policy initiatives such as a recent one to address nursing fatigue



CNA president-elect Barbara Mildon

Halifax | Community health nurses are like superheroes, Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) president-elect Barbara Mildon told a laughing group of about 300 nurses gathered in Halifax yesterday at the wrap-up keynote session of the fifth annual three-day national conference of the Community Health Nurses of Canada (CHNC).

Superman had an alter ego, she explained, the unassuming reporter Clark Kent. In a crisis he threw off that role and dove into action, much the same way a nurse does during a public health crisis. "Let's not believe our work is invisible. It is our knowledge and experience that saves lives when there's a crisis."

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Mildon was responding to concerns that the day-to-day work of Canada's community health nurses is undervalued since they can be seconded into new roles in crises like H1N1. But Mildon said it is the credibility of nurses, dedicated professionals who create healthy and vibrant people, communities and societies, both here at home and across the globe, that is the profession's trump card. "Our life's work is to look out for the best interests of others," she said.

Mildon is the vice president of professional practice and research, and chief nurse executive at the Ontario Shores Centre for Mental Health Sciences, in Whitby, Ont. She appealed passionately to the audience, whom she referred to as "bedside to boardroom nurses," to rally together during difficult times. The nursing profession is facing excessive workloads, she said, exacerbated by increasing patient acuity, higher patient volumes and a growing complexity of treatment modalities. Current estimates are

that Canada will face a shortage of 60,000 nurses by 2022 if policies don't change. It's possible to reverse this, Mildon said, and she implored the audience to become involved in CNA policy initiatives such as a recent one to address nursing fatigue. "Putting client and patient safety first means we must deal head-on with (our own) fatigue, overwork and work-life balance."

Community health nurses are a practice specialty and the CHNC is an associate group of the CNA. Mildon called for unity, saying that by working together each association can lever the other's effectiveness. Their relationship strengthens and sustains nursing in Canada, Mildon said. "Together we dream more, we dare more, and we definitely do more. We are in it together. And we are all CNA."

Referencing the conference's theme: "The Time is Now: Influence, Impacts, Outcomes," Mildon talked about the achievements in community health nursing in the past year in such areas as promoting social justice and health equity, and keeping a focus on social, economic and environmental determinants of health. "We shy away from the war analogy but I know sometimes it must feel like that."

In closing, Mildon harkened back to one of nursing's most famous pioneers—Florence Nightingale. Facing squalor and poverty, Nightingale responded with logic, statistical and scientific knowledge for solutions to community care, Mildon said. "She professionalized nursing. Look at this one woman's legacy...(her) cause has been taken up by so many nurses that followed. Her cause was not nursing. It was humanity. Nursing allowed Florence Nightingale to free humanity from the bonds of suffering. She touched the lives of millions as each of you touches the lives of millions."

Tags: CHNC, CNA, community health nurse, superhero