NURSE’S DAY SPEECH

FOR

CAROL KASTER

Hello everyone and welcome to this year’s Nurse’s Day acknowledgement event! I want to thank all of you for being here at today’s celebration, but even more, I want to thank all of you for having the courage, compassion and resourcefulness to choose to be nurses. (**If there are any special people in the audience that you would like to thank, do so here**). As I said, today is about acknowledging all of you, but I would like to extend a special thanks to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

Someone once said that nurses are angels in comfortable shoes, but Florence Nightingale probably said it best when she said, “Nursing is an art: and if it is to be made an art, it requires an exclusive devotion as hard a preparation, as any painter’s or sculptor’s work; for what is the having to do with dead canvas or dead marble, compared with having to do with the living body, the temple of God’s spirit? It is one of the Fine Arts: I had almost said, the finest of Fine Arts.” Florence Nightingale was born into privilege. Her father was a wealthy English landowner and she was raised to inherit that lifestyle, but at an early age, and with a rather independent and maverick spirit, she followed **her** calling with courage, compassion and determination, and probably personally forged the path that all nurses subsequently followed. From her innovative contributions to the soldiers in the Crimea, to the books she wrote and the theories she advocated, Florence Nightingale led the way to create a safer, more hygienic and more effective way to care for patients, and the world has thankfully, never been the same since her contribution impacted the medical profession. She selflessly-and sometimes anonymously, contributed to the advancement of this very noble profession and has been a guiding light for all of us for over 150 years. I am sure each one of you knows something about her, and you are all to be acknowledged for your relationship with her as you heed the same calling of her purpose and spirit.

(**If you want to tell a little joke, you can say**) I once heard a story about a famous doctor who went on safari in Africa. Upon his return, he seemed a bit depressed. When asked what the problem was, he said, “My trip was very disappointing…didn’t kill a thing…I might as well have stayed here in the hospital!!” (**Wait for the laugh**). Doctors may lead the teams of health care professionals, but of course we all know that nurses are the backbone and the heart of the medical profession, and let’s face it-where would doctors be without us? Although successful doctors possess the knowledge and intuition necessary to treat and heal all manner of disease and medical conditions, it is the nurse who provides essential support and wisdom-at every level and to everyone involved in a case. Whether the doctor, patient or other support staff needs something, it is usually the nurse that has the vision, foresight and training to provide what is needed and wanted in a given medical situation. Every single nurse from Nurse’s Aide to RN, LPN to Nurse Practitioner, has a critical role to play in every phase of medicine. I think it’s safe to say that, at one time or another, each one of us will have the opportunity to be treated by a nurse. The profession is pervasive. There is no getting around the impact that nurses have on EVERYONE’S lives, and, if I may take a moment to speak as a potential patient and not as a professional, thank goodness for that!

As medicine and modern technology advance, so does the role of the nurse within the profession. Now more than ever, each one of us has to be prepared to handle new parameters, restrictions, information and regulations, and all the while must also remember that the most essential role of the nurse is to provide a safe space and compassion to every single patient with whom we come into contact, and that is no easy feat. Life is moving at a breakneck pace in our personal and professional lives. Although modern technology has provided unprecedented convenience in many areas of life and work, we also have the potential to be more overwhelmed than ever before. It’s quite apparent that we are all being bombarded from every angle with bits of news and information all the time. Talk about attention deficit! It’s getting harder and harder for everyone to focus and complete tasks, and for us, it’s probably a significant achievement to remain grounded and focused every day in any kind of situation-lives depend on the focus we can achieve and maintain. As nurses, we have to remember to remain centered, present, functional and effective, no matter what outside influence may be about to bombard us. We have a higher purpose, and although it can sometimes seem daunting to have so much responsibility, each one of us plays a major role in supporting the quality of life of others.

As our profession has evolved and matured, there are many different types of nurses within our calling, and each and every one of you, no matter the training or degree or certificate you have earned, makes an indelible contribution to peoples’ lives. I want to acknowledge all levels of nursing, from Nurse’s Aide to RN; from LPN to Nurse Practitioner, each one of you demonstrates your keen skills and dedication to your tasks every single day. No matter what may be going on in your world or in the world around you, you place your commitment first and that is an inspiration.

To those of you who are Nurse’s Aides, thank you for your commitment to tending to the personal needs of our patients. Thank you for keeping records, caring for patients and performing all of the essential duties required to maintain the well being of people who really need you-and I don’t just mean the patients! Your caring and supportive attention to the daily details of patient life is more important than you’ll probably ever realize and your thoroughness allows the doctors and other nursing staff the chance to most effectively care for each patient.

I want to give a special thanks to all of the Registered Nurses here today. Your intuition and finely honed skills make a lasting contribution to the health and welfare of patients at every level. Your ability to tend to patients and perform sophisticated procedures is an incredible adjunct to the physician’s role in diagnosing, treating, and healing the patient. No matter what your function may be at any given time, your presence has the power to instill confidence and a sense of positivity in those who benefit from your care. If you haven’t heard this enough, on behalf of all of the patients and staff, thank you.

To our LPN’s, thank you for providing the extra hands and brains and hearts needed to effectively and thoroughly tend to each patient every day. Your supportive completion of everyday tasks acts as an extension of much needed high quality nursing care and every patient has a better chance to heal thanks to your caring function.

To all of you who are Nurse Practitioners, in this day and age of health care reform and budgetary constraints for both medical facilities and patients, your role has become indispensible in modern medicine. Because you have chosen to be Nurse Practitioners, lives are being saved. People who may not have been able to seek medical treatment in the past now have a solution to receiving quality attention. Your knowledge and training inspires health care to be more accessible and whatever specialty you have chosen, from midwifery to geriatric care, you provide an opportunity for people from all walks of life to be cared for. In many ways you fulfill the responsibilities of a doctor, but let’s face it, you all probably have better handwriting! (**Wait for the laugh**).

Imagine what Nurse Nightingale would think if she observed today’s nurses in action! Imagine what she would think of how, in spite of the challenges each generation has faced to maintain quality nursing care, the profession has matured. I know that in our daily lives we yearn for more support, bigger budgets, better equipment, but what was nursing like before Florence Nightingale? It’s hard to believe, but the profession was almost non-existent. Although throughout history people obviously got sick and needed to recover, support came from within the family and it was expected that the daughters in the family would provide ample attention. Throughout history, horror stories abound about what passed for medical treatment and health care. The earliest forms of hospitals in ancient civilizations were more like hospices and provided more of a refuge than a place where someone might be treated and healed. With the advent of Christianity, healing and caring for patients became more of a priority, but once again, it was generally the daughters who cared for the sick, unless it was local monastic orders whose nuns pledged to care for patients. Even as recently as the Victorian era, which also saw the birth and flourishing of Nurse Nightingale, the family cared for the sick. Even Queen Victoria herself insisted that her daughters play an active role in home health care-even going as far as insisting her youngest daughter, Princess Beatrice, remain at home to care for her. Even after Beatrice married, she lived at home with her mother for 16 years-with her husband (thanks Mom!) until Queen Victoria died. Let’s face it-they DID live in a palace, but even so, I suppose we can say that England’s queen ruled with an iron fist-no matter if it was for the country or her own family!

I want to congratulate all of you for seeing the power in nursing and for choosing to be nurses. It takes a special kind of person-one with strength, enthusiasm and determination, to experience some of the things we’ve all seen and to keep going because you know how much people need you. Of course, there must have been times when this didn’t seem like the best career choice, but we all face challenges in life and it’s the people who consistently demonstrate perseverance, dedication and compassion who will succeed. To me, you are all heroes and resounding successes and I am proud to have you on our team. Keep up the great and selfless work you all do and I look forward to celebrating with all of you again next year. Thank you all!