The Nurses Association Of Jamaica

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

NATIONAL NURSES' WEEK JULY 14 – 20, 2019

Nurses and friends it is indeed an honour to bring you the President’s message on this the celebration of national nurses’ week; it is indeed a time to celebrate you and nursing. I use this opportunity on behalf of the Officers and Executive to thank all of our nurses for your tireless effort and self-sacrifice in ensuring that the health care needs of the populace is addressed; sometimes in less than ideal conditions and with limited resources and I encourage you to continue to do it for the love of nursing and your own people. I also want to encourage all citizens to join us in celebrating our nurses and each one that may or will cross your path I ask you to wish them a happy nurses’ week and give an encouraging word. The theme for the year is “Nurses a Voice to Lead, Health for All”; it is a call to action for all of us to ensure that as nurses we continue to be the real voice for those we serve and for us to assess if we are really ensuring that the needs of the populace are being met in a timely humane manner, and it is also a time to take action in relation to our own health. And so my sub-theme is ensuring a Healthy You. As we progress through the remainder of this year I encourage us to ponder the full theme Nurses a Voice to Lead; Health for All Ensuring a Healthy You.

I am fully aware that it has become more challenging for all nurses from the administrative, managerial and operational level as we grapple with severe nurse reduction in all health care facilities. Last year the Public Sector lost over five hundred (500) nurses to resignation, more than ninety five percent (95%) of whom have migrated and at the present rate we may lose the same or even more if we are not able to slow the exodus of these our nurses. The patient load and expectations on the other hand continue to increase, thus creating a disproportion between supply and demand for nursing care. It is a real huge challenge that we all face as health care providers, which begs for active action in regards to the proposed Primary Care renewal, because for any meaningful change to occur at all levels of the health care delivery system we must shift the burden from Secondary and Tertiary Care to Primary Care so as to ensure a healthier populace. The NAJ again calls on those responsible to ensure the enactment of the Advance Practice Nurse legislation in the best interest of health care delivery because this coupled with the packaging of basic health care service, will become crucial in ensuring achievement of health for all in order to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
Nurse I know that the demand for your skill and expertise is growing exponentially but I beg of you to give a little more time to your country, I implore our new graduates to give at least two years of service to this your country, during which time you can better hone your skill, and to those who have completed post basic courses to do the same and let the investment in you prove worthwhile for the populace you serve. I can't and will not say to you don't leave because I know you too have unmet needs that your country is not willing to ensure is addressed despite the NAJ's best efforts, and I also know that some of you just need to have a different experience and possible to work in a more conducive environment. But if each new graduate pledges to give at least two years' service every year from each batch, then we can be assured some level of stability. I will dare to say this is also dependent on the employment practices of the Regional Health Authorities (RHA) because we are also aware that many new graduates wait up to two years or more to be employed so that by the time they are considered for employment by one of the RHA's they would have already decided on their next best option. The NAJ has had many discussions in this regard with our policy makers and we are expecting to see changes because the theme health for all is also a call for action by the employers to ensure that there is adequate and safe staffing levels to meet the nursing care needs of their service populace. Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus Director General for the World Health Organization (WHO) indicated to us at the International Council of Nursing (ICN) Conference June 2019 that September 17, 2019 is declared and will be celebrated as the first World Patient Safety Day; it therefore means that the RHA's and the Ministry of Health and Wellness must act and be held accountable to their commitment in ensuring safe patient care delivery which hinges on safe staffing levels.

Based on worldwide evidence and the reports put forward it is projected that by 2030 nine million nurses will be required across the world to fill the gaps in nursing so as to meet the health care needs. It was also clearly articulated at our last ICN conference June 2019 that the countries we thought to have excess nurses to rely on to fill the shortfall in ours as well as other countries, is also grappling with severe reductions. The WHO is presently undertaking an assessment of the "State of the World Nurses" in each country and region and the projected impact for the delivery of health care. Our country's policymakers have been lukewarm in this regard; some see the migration of our nurses in the eyes of more remittance while others see the solution to our challenge as recruitment of nurses from other countries but this too is foreseen to become even a greater challenge for nations like ours in its present mindset. So I again call on the Ministry of Health and Wellness and the Ministry of Finance and the Public Service and the RHA's to ensure that we are remunerating our nurses better and that meaningful and immediate action be taken to improve the working conditions. Some RHA's have failed repeatedly to even demonstrate appreciation in one way or another for the efforts of our nurses citing financial constraints; change is required in this regard to encourage nurses to remain a little longer in the system.

Colleagues I encourage you not to let this be just another ordinary Nurses' Week for you but let this month July be the month and week when you stop and assess your own health and what you have been or is doing to address your own health and wellness. Let this be the month when you
not ask what are they doing for me, but rather what am I doing for myself? We operate in a
general health care delivery system where we see health at its best and at its worst. It has been
long recognized that when a health care provider experiences a health challenge it appears to be
worse than that of those who do not work in the system. We are fully cognizant of what the
system can offer to address ill health and are also fully aware of our present financial status and
that the opportunity may not present itself for us to go anywhere else for treatment; so let us all
start with prevention and where this is not possible, let us take active action in treating with our
health concerns and adhere to our treatment and dietary considerations.

Now many of us do not actively participate in physical activity so start right there; surprise
yourself by doing a little at a time and then sign up for one of the 5K walk/runs and then reward
yourself by feeling the release of your feel-good hormones. And after you have surprised
yourself, encourage your family members and colleagues one by one to join you on the road to
better health. I encourage those in and around the corporate area who doesn’t know where or
have nowhere to go to join us and utilize your fitness area upstairs the NAJ Secretariat that is at
the office complex; come and join the others. I also encourage us to cultivate good mental health
by thinking positively, developing the right attitude and values and self-talk when life becomes
challenging and always seek professional help when you cannot assist yourself. Remember you
can’t run from or leave you because you are wherever you are. Some of us fall short when it
comes to eating healthy so I encourage you to evaluate your eating habits; I believe a man or
woman is the end product of what he/she consumes so start creating healthier eating habits. I am
fully conscious that the system in which we work does not cater to our welfare and so what is
available to purchase may not be the best. Therefore I encourage you to shop better, include
healthier choices and remember it is not the quantity but the quality. And may I say it is now
classy to walk with your own prepared meal or snacks and it is satisfying to make your own fruit
or vegetable juices because this is the only time you are certain that there are no hidden additives
in them. I beg of you to stop slowly hurting yourself by not eating when you are at work
sometimes for eight or sixteen hours, because you want to complete your duties and care for all
your patients before end of shift(s). Take at least fifteen minutes to refresh yourself; we are all
guilty but we must change in our own best interest. I use this opportunity to call on our
employers from the Ministry of Health and Wellness and the Regional Health Authorities to
demonstrate concern for employees welfare by ensuring that there is somewhere at the facilities
that employees can purchase and consume healthy meals or snacks.

Smoking and consumption of alcohol is not a real coping strategy neither is it a healthy feel good
activity; so those of us who may be inclined should seek alternatives and remember the populace
knows who we are and is observing because they expect us to be good examples. I encourage
you all to utilize counseling services that are available and if your present friends are not able to
help to elevate you then I think it is time to change them and to step up to a better way of life.
Let this July be the time to set new goals and targets for yourselves and let them not be like
failed New Year resolutions. It is time to do your pap smears, self-breast examination,
mammograms, prostate examination and an executive blood profile to ascertain your baseline and then build from there, and let every July be your annual feel-good month.

I again encourage us to look out for and after our own colleagues with whom we work and those who will come to us for care. Let us take care of our own; we are in this business together and if we do not care for each other who else will? Let us develop coping skills so that when it feels like our brains are going to explode, when the feet gets weary and emotions are kindled, we don’t create damaged emotions and irreparable relationships. Let us learn to self-talk when tried by others, be always mindful of the need to be courteous, and also about whom we are and whose we are. Seek assistance from those who are trained in restorative justice where and when necessary.

Nursing is a wonderful profession, as nurses we are present from birth to the end of life cycle so let our journey count for each patient/client and us, despite the ills in the system. Let us make our own contributions to make the system better by expending a little more effort and become a greater voice to lead. We can’t all be sailing in the same boat along with stable current and no tide we have got to change; at all levels of nursing we seem to be experiencing a period of apathy; yes I know the challenges are great and can become daunting, but the state of nursing requires that we all become active participants in speaking up and out for changes that are required both from the education aspect down to service delivery; the Regional Examination for Nurses Registration is proving to be challenged also which begs concern for the projected availability of nurses to fill the demand and we must seek meaningful intervention in this regard. Globally our colleagues are ensuring that the quality of nurses and nursing is improved at all levels. Our meetings and inputs need to be purpose driven and we must in all spheres of our work seek to produce the evidence that will drive action. My hope is that we will seek to produce evidence through research and analysis at the local as well as the national level that will convince the policy makers and our employers to stop and take action, so as to improve health and wellbeing as well as nursing in this country. When this is achieved the NAJ will and I hope in the near future publish two volumes of the Jamaican Nurse Journal with nursing and health care research and distribute copies to the Ministry of Health and Wellness, the RHA’s and our policy makers so that they can better appreciate the work and worth of nurses contributions to health care delivery and the achievement of health for all. Colleagues, the time is now for all of us as nurses to take action to improve the quantity and quality of nurses and nursing in Jamaica.

Nurses, the Association needs you and want more of you to participate in it to ensure its longevity, it belongs to all of us and not just a few. We have achieved 73 years of greatness through the efforts of those who have been volunteering and has built on the legacy of our foremothers, it is now your opportunity to make it greater. Let’s imagine for one minute what nursing in Jamaica would be like without the NAJ, where would nurses and nursing be? I can’t imagine it and so I encourage the uncommitted to connect and make a difference, make your contribution be a lasting legacy. Look beyond just working to earn a salary and embrace the opportunities that are available; volunteerism and altruism seem to be dying out amongst us but
as nurses we know how to breathe life into a dead thing, so come lets breathe greater life into the Association because we need more persons who are prepared to lead and speak up and out. And as Michael Jackson said let’s look at the man and I add the woman in the mirror and pledge to make a change and if you should say you don’t have a mirror, look at your phone screen and pledge to make that change.

Health for all means not only ensuring equality but also equity so as to be able to meet each individual’s specific health needs while being cognizant of their human rights. For a very long time we have been told that billions of dollars have been identified to effect meaningful changes in the health sector so as to ensure that we remain on the path to achieve health for all. I ask of our policymakers that real action be taken now and that they ensure full involvement of the end users from the design through to the implementation phase to ensure functionality and acceptability of staff and patients/clients as well if we are to ensure health for all.

For meaningful success to be achieved nationally health policies must be included in all Ministries for example the Ministry of Economic Growth, and Job Creation, Tourism, Labour and Social Services, Finance etc. Lifestyle and the environment have a huge role to play in health for all. Health is impacted by issues such as disasters, poverty, and economic development/industrialization. Too often we see and hear the concern in the news regarding Organizations not being mindful of their corporate responsibility to the people and the environment. Jamaica is now more exposed to others who have experienced poor environmental practices that have led to air and land pollution in their spaces. We must not let the cry of those affected fall on deaf ears but help to be the voice that leads.

Colleagues, in order to ensure compassion in our practice we must first try to understand our patients/clients first as a human being rather than as a patient/client with signs and symptoms. Nurses are usually at the core of the health care team, you are always with the patients/client and family and so we must seek to advocate for what is just and right for them. We must seek to educate and train the community to accept responsibility for their own health by engaging in healthier practices. Nurses possess scientific reasoning skills as our practice is based on evidence and so we must use all opportunities to share our knowledge. Nursing and nurses has been the profession to promote public health, advocated for the rights of all and that is why it was with ease we partnered with organizations/groups such as the Women Resource Outreach Centre on their Human rights in Maternal Neonatal and Infant Health. We provide care across the life span and our code of ethics dictates that we be mindful of human rights in all its facets when administering care. I implore those in Primary Care to arise and add your voice and intellect to the changes that are promised for Primary Care renewal; make your input and let us hold the Minister of Health and Wellness accountable for what is promised, it is full time because the citizens and us deserve a better system and working spaces. It should not only be selected facilities that are supported to deliver compassionate care but all facilities be so equipped; there must be equity and not just equality because each client and facility requires different treatment. Let us as nurses who must always be present in the good and the bad times and spaces, insist that
it cannot continue to be talk shop or just a feel good moment for the applause but substance must come forth.

Nurses the ICN has lit the lamp and the WHO has caught the visions and the Director General Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus has declared 2020 as the year of the Nurse and Midwife and has big plans for the year; we must now warm ourselves with the flame and pass on the heat to our employers so that we can have a memorable year of celebration because guess what, it is us as nurses who must ensure that it becomes a reality in every nook and cranny of this island. I encourage all of us to join together and plan activities in all the institutions and health districts for the year so that it will leave a sweet taste that will linger for years to come; Let us do it for ourselves and let us do it for nursing. I am ready and I hope you are too so let the millennia’s and the baby boomers join together to make it real for nurses. I invite corporate Jamaica to join us and make it a big big year for nursing and nurses in Jamaica.

On behalf of our entire membership I register our thanks to LASCO our main sponsor for the work and effort in ensuring that nurses are recognized and highlighted. Our profound appreciation to Mr. Lascelles A. Chin OJ, CD Founder and Executive Chairman LASCO Affiliated Companies and also to Renee and her team. A never-ending thank you to all our many other sponsors who continue to make it worthwhile for nurses and nursing; your generosity is deeply felt and appreciated. Thanks to our employees, Officers and Executive and the many volunteers both nurses and non-nurses whose contribution ensures the continued progress of the NAJ.

Nurses one and all have a great week, enjoy your local activities and also join in the national celebrations; keep the lamp burning, have nuff fun and walk good and God blessings to you.

I remain united in service your president Carmen L. Johnson.

Carmen L. Johnson (Miss)