PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

INTERNATIONAL NURSES’ DAY

MAY 12, 2021

The Nurses Association of Jamaica (NAJ) continues to partner with nurses locally, regionally and internationally in celebrating Nurses - our everyday HEROES on this International Nurses’ Day. To my colleagues island-wide and in the Diaspora I salute you and say well done, continue to give of your best.

Today as a nation we pause to acknowledge our Nursing Pioneers. I acknowledge the contribution of Florence Nightingale the founder of modern nursing. Her impact has been far-reaching and so celebrating her birthday worldwide on this day speaks volumes to her inextricable contribution as a Nurse Leader.

I also acknowledge our own Mary Seacole who celebrated her 215th birthday last November, her work and bravery blazed the trail and set the examples for us as Jamaican Nurses. Through these examples set by her we have learnt that we never give up; if we have a vision we persevere until we accomplish the goal. Sometimes we may have to evaluate and reset targets, but giving up is never an option.

The Nursing profession continues to be the backbone of the Jamaican healthcare sector. Accepting the new reality of working in a Pandemic, even in less than optimal conditions, we have remained strong and resilient ensuring that the populace continues to receive quality care. The year has been one of many challenges, we have had to open closed doors, maneuver slippery terrains and overcome many obstacles, some days we felt like giving up. But we forged on and in the words of Sylvester Stallone – “going one more round when you don’t think you can, that is what makes all the difference” and Nurses, you have made that difference in the lives of many.

Last year, the Nurses across Jamaica answered the clarion call and stood up like warriors to keep the healthcare system afloat. Every day they faced ethical dilemmas, with overcrowded wards, shortage of or inappropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), stigma and discrimination from the public, fearful family members, and sometimes even our own co-workers who believed that the Nurse was the only specimen trained to care for these patients.
Hospitals were declared as being in the “RED” zone, vital supplies ran out, but Nurses were always there, supporting whatever measure the government put in place.

The NAJ lauds you for your yeoman service, and even when our employers seemed not to understand, when they understood but did not see beyond their own agendas and targets, Nurses in Jamaica continue to stand. Many nurses have been infected, others affected as they grapple with the loss of loved ones; our condolences to you and your families. Our family members, spouses, children and significant others also went through emotion turmoil, fearing whether we would take this dreaded disease home to them, as day after day we put on our amours and step out to face the enemy.

Over the last few months, as the rollout of the vaccination process became imminent, Nurses you have truly shown resilience and creativity. When I look back at the how Nurses supported and championed the rollout during the many “blitz” held island-wide, getting over eighty thousand (80,000) persons vaccinated in just 5 days, PHENOMENAL is too small a word to describe the feat. Nurses came like worker bees from every specialty and what some would say every ‘nook and cranny’ and joined forces in making it happen. Some, myself included, were skeptical, but we pulled out all the stops and got the job done. KUDOS to you all.

This pandemic has shown that Nurses are flexible, proactive, innovative and creative, and it is time for governments, especially the Government of Jamaica to seriously take a look at the work and worth of Nurse and the Nursing Profession, and to invest in this vital resource to build better prepared, more resilient health systems for the future.

The theme this year “Nurses: A voice to lead-A vision for future healthcare”, seeks to show how nursing will look in the future as well as how the profession will transform the next stage of healthcare.

A message by Annette Kennedy, President, and Howard Catton, Chief Executive Officer of the International Council of Nurses, states “Nurses are on the frontlines of this pandemic, working to educate, research, prevent, treat and care for people with compassion, care resilience, creativity and great leadership skills”. They further point out “that the pandemic has revealed that many of our health services are not fit for purpose, and the bigger picture is that unless there is a drastic reset of policies, practices and possibilities, they will not enable to deliver on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals”.

As we salute and applaud our Nurses, we thank those who have partnered with us over the years and especially the last year to help to make life a little more comfortable for the Nurses. COVID-19 has clearly demonstrated that mitigating the impact of the virus is not solely the responsibility of health professionals. It is up to every member of the public, individuals and communities. Thank you, corporate Jamaica for your support.

The choppy waters we are forced to tread are yet to subside, I urge the Government to take a second and third look at the Nurses and let us know that you appreciate us. Kickbusch 2018 postulates
that Nursing care accounts for approximately 80% of the contacts between patients and health care providers. Investing in nursing will improve health services as well as bolster heath promotion and disease prevention – a core element of achieving and sustaining Universal Health Coverage. The Ministries of Health & Wellness and Finance & the Public Service will now have to huddle and see how best they can strategize to stem the migration of this endangered species.

We have been called to be at the forefront, we must be transformational in our effort to continue to provide quality, safe accessible healthcare. This is a call to duty, despite the challenges. Let us rise up and stand up and be that Voice to Lead. I wish for you a HAPPY INTERNATIONAL NURSES’ DAY.

Patsy Edwards-Henry
President