

# Nurses Association of Jamaica



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## President's Message

### National Nurses Week July 14-20, 2024

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*'When we strive to become better than we are, everything around us becomes better too.'* A reminder from Paulo Coelho.

I bring you warm greetings for Nurses Week 2024 from the Nurses Association of Jamaica, Officers and Executive members. Nurses Week is celebrated each year in Jamaica in the month of July during the week of the 19<sup>th</sup>. This is in recognition of the birth of the Nurses Association of Jamaica (formerly the JGTNA) in 1946. On that date, seven Trailblazers made the move that have led us to this place today. They are Dame Nita Barrow, Grace March, Julie Symes, Eva Lowe, Cynthia Vernon, Violet Skeffrey and Zoe Burrowes. These pioneers would go on to become leaders at some point in time of this noble organization, with Dame Nita Barrow being our first President.

Every year the International Council of Nurses (ICN), a Federation of more than 130 NNAs around the world representing over 28 million nurses, posits a theme and it is used for the year by National Nurses Associations in celebrating Nurses. This year, the theme is *'Our Nurses. Our Future. The Economic Power of Care'*.

Our ICN theme reminds us of the importance of Nurses. It speaks to the investments needed to increase the productivity of the health workforce resulting in good health, economic growth, job creation and productive gains in other sectors. Despite being the backbone of healthcare, Nursing faces financial constraints and societal undervaluation. At a time, such as this, we seek to embrace the profession of nursing. We honour our nurses who continue to work through adverse situations and under duress in existing poor working environments and harsh weather patterns as was experienced earlier this month with the passing of Hurricane Beryl which caused major trauma to some of our members.

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The lack of resources continues to be the voice of the advocacy body as we seek to ensure that Government is held accountable for providing the necessary resources need to provide care to our clients. Remuneration continues to be a struggle, as we seek to remain financially stable in the existing economy. This causes the advocacy body to remain in constant dialogue with the relevant stakeholders, as we seek to get what is deserving and ensure that we remain relevant financially. The socio-economic welfare of our members remains foremost in our discussions with Government.

It is our hope, that all stakeholders will recognize the influence that comes through quality health care, recognize that Nurses make up the majority of the health care provision workforce, and that it is important that we all understand our roles in shaping the perceptions of the profession and the professional.

The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) in its IND 2024 message looked at key messages relating to nursing in the Americas. These include:

- In the health sector, women face inequalities in salary distribution. We must promote gender equity in the nursing workforce to improve working conditions and promote retention of these professionals in their own countries
- Nurses interact directly with the community and can be critical leaders in health policy making. It is therefore essential to promote leadership opportunities and develop the capacities of nursing professionals
- Through innovations in health, nurses will be able to expand access to PHC based health services for populations in conditions of vulnerability in rural or underserved areas

Today we say to our stakeholders, if there is genuine interest in Nursing and Nurses, look at the inequities. Look at the causes of the challenges that we currently face. Develop solid retention strategies that will stem the brain drain. Engage the NAJ in the relevant discussions. I call on the Ministry of Health and Wellness to assist us in getting through to the Ministry of Finance and the Public Service in relation to the overdue outstanding Compensation Review Items. The dialogue is almost non-existent as communication continues to be a challenge especially when it comes to follow up. We call for equity in how matters relating to Human Resources and their welfare are addressed.

I call on ALL our stakeholders, here and abroad: Let us not be weary in well-doing, but let us join hands, heart and resources, to continue to fly the banner of nursing higher as we seek to make our voices be heard, creating a positive impact on the lives of those that we interact with. Let us seek to Protect and invest in the Nursing profession; Urgently address and improve support for Nurses' health and wellbeing by ensuring safe and healthy working conditions and respecting their rights; Advance strategies to recruit and retain nurses to address workforce shortages. Improve compensation for nurses to ensure fair and decent pay and benefits, and uphold positive practice environments; Develop, implement and finance national nursing workforce plans; Invest in high quality, accredited nursing education programs; Enable nurses to work their full scope of nursing practice; Recognize and value nurses' skills, knowledge, attributes and expertise; Actively and meaningfully engage National Nurses Associations; Protect vulnerable populations, uphold and respect human rights, gender equity and social justice; and last but not least, appoint Nurse Leaders. These requests have been adapted from the ICN as we see them as being relevant to us here in Jamaica.

Hurricane Beryl has taught us that **'Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much.'** – **Helen Keller**. The resilience of the nursing team was evident in the 24, 36 and up to 48 hour shifts that were covered by nurses to ensure that the services remained in place. Thanks to you all for the dedication shown in this time.

Stephen Covey reminds us, **‘I am not a product of my circumstances. I am a product of my decisions.’** As we go out in our different facilities and our various disciplines, always remember that. You made the decision to become a Nurse. Be the best Nurse you can be. Perform your duties responsibly. Be reminded of your commitment to professionalism and your ethical responsibility.

The ICN has issued a Call to Action for Global Health Leaders and Policymakers. The requests include; Empower Nurses, invest in education and workforce development, enhance working conditions, Acknowledge and Compensate fairly, and Promote Nursing’s role in society. We can achieve all this and more as we work together to achieve set goals.

National Nurses Week is a time for us all to celebrate the dynamism of Nurses and Nursing as a profession, looking at the impact we have on our patients, communities and our own lives. It is a time for reflection on the impact that we have on those who come into contact with us.

This year the week will be celebrated **July 14 – 20, 2024**. The activities include Church Service at the Spalding New Testament Church of God Cathedral on Sunday; Annual Gertrude Swaby Lecture and Summer School on Tuesday and Wednesday; Founders Day Celebration on Friday and the Nurse and Nursing Student of the Year awards Ceremony on Saturday. Other activities include Courtesy Visits to the Prime Minister, leader of the Opposition, Governor General, Mayor and Minister of Health. This helps to showcase nursing, widening the reach of the profession and improving on the experiences that can be gained being a Nurse.

To all non-nurses, this week I encourage you to join me in expressing heartfelt appreciation for all those who have dedicated their lives to Nursing. Take a moment to appreciate them with a simple thank you or a more tangible show of gratitude if you are so led. Be that spark of motivation that might be needed at this time to push a colleague, family member or friend to make that additional sacrifice to go on. Let them know how much value they bring to the facilities and homes by touching the lives of those that they care for each day. Your show of gratitude will mean the world to them.

To the extraordinary membership of the NAJ I say to you, thanks for being phenomenal people. Thank you for touching lives, providing comfort and remaining committed to the task at hand. You are not just heroes but an inspiration to all. Your contribution to the health care delivery system is valued and recognised as exemplary. Your work is not just a job but a true testament to your compassion and commitment to the clients, families, self and employers. Thank you for answering the call and choosing this profession that impacts other. You are celebrated this week and beyond.

To all amazing nurses, your kindness and empathy touch the lives of so many. The NAJ will continue to work on behalf of membership to meet the stated mandates and to propel the profession to the highest attainable levels. We will continue to engage our critical stakeholders on matters of interest to the profession and continue to blaze the trail. **Happy Nurses Week.** Your compassionate care brings healing to those in need. We are grateful for your unwavering dedication and professionalism as we remain **‘United in Service’**. I thank you.

Dawn Marie Richards  
President