



One of nursing's "top models," Diana J. Mason, PhD, RN, FAAN, takes time out to reflect on her role in perpetuating a positive image in nursing as the editor-in-chief of the *American Journal of Nursing*.

Fashioning the Right Impression

What is it like having a high profile image in nursing?

My position as editor-in-chief of AJN provides me with an invaluable opportunity to raise significant issues and bring different perspectives to important debates on the most compelling nursing and healthcare matters of our times. So we're often publishing provocative, controversial articles with the intent of spurring debate and discussion. But you have to be prepared to take the heat that can be generated from such controversy. Several years ago, we published a poem that we knew would be controversial because of its sexual theme, but did so after the peer reviewers recommended it for publication (albeit with the caveat that some readers might object to it). "Object to it" is an understatement. We were flooded with emails and letters. People were contacting the president of the company because they wanted me fired. I don't think I was

adequately prepared for this onslaught of criticism, but I certainly am now. I learned many important lessons about myself and our nursing community; namely, I learned about being prepared to take the heat as part of taking calculated risks. I also learned the importance of the courage needed to stand your ground in the face of extreme opposition while always reflecting upon motives and intentions. I also learned that many nurses are extremely uncomfortable with conversations about sexual matters, despite its place in our personal and professional lives.

I also have the privilege of representing nursing to the broader healthcare and public communities. I must think carefully about the manner in which I speak, present myself, prepare myself,

and engage others in conversations about nursing's contributions to healthcare. Every nurse's encounter with patients and families represents an opportunity to demonstrate nurses' critical thinking, professional attitude, and compassion.

How did your nursing career progress to the position you currently hold?

Prior to my current position, I held a number of diverse positions as a clinician, researcher, manager, journalist, and educator. I have long been active in professional nursing and health-related organizations, and I read a broad range of nursing, medical and news publica-

tions. So, I'm knowledgeable about current issues and trends. The mission of AJN is to promote excellence in nursing and healthcare. As a researcher, I've learned about critiquing research and I've written a lot. I was well prepared to be the editor of AJN with an eye toward raising its journalistic standards, publishing important original research and cutting edge clinical papers, and disseminating the articles beyond our subscribers. My journalism background includes over 20 years of producing and moderating a weekly radio program in New York City, so I understood the importance of taking nursing's expertise to the public. We've had a deliberate media strategy at AJN, and it's paid off. We're the nursing journal most frequently cited in the public media, including appearing periodically in leading publications such as the *New York Times*. I believe that we've made a significant contribution to reversing nursing's invisibility in the public and in media.

What are a few examples of how media reflects nursing in today's society?

Nursing is often invisible to journalists and is misrepresented by the entertainment industry. Turn on one of the health-related TV dramas and you will see physicians doing nursing care and nurses hardly appearing at all. Most times, it's a sin of omission, but these omissions were so disturbing to me that I no longer watch these programs. When a physician is portrayed as being degraded by a colleague simply by saying the person thought the physician was a nurse, it's more than I can bear.

Johnson & Johnson's media campaign to promote nursing has evolved into a thoughtful, powerful initiative that I believe has contributed to the escalating number of nursing school applicants, including applicants with other careers who have come to realize that nursing is meaningful work. We need more accurate portrayals of nurses

and the work they do. That doesn't mean a producer needs to develop a script for a TV program that shows nurses as angels. All I ask is that they show the centrality of nurses to quality healthcare, along with our individuals' sagas, quirks, and conflicts. I've long said that nursing is the stuff of great drama—and great comedy.

How do you think that nursing students can best portray a positive image of nursing?

First, I recommend that all nursing students read the book *From Silence to Voice* by Bernice Buresh and Suzanne Gordon. These authors show nurses the importance of describing their work and its value to anyone and everyone. We must be prepared to articulate what we do as nurses, show the critical thinking that is involved, and emphasize that excellence in nursing is not just about kindness. It's about providing thoughtful, complex, intellectually-demanding care with compassion.

Second, if we want to promote a better public image of nursing, it's

Third, we must be seen as advocates for patients and families. This can take the form of fighting for pain medicine prescriptions for the post-op patient who is inadequately medicated, or by challenging an order to discharge a very ill patient when neither the patient nor the family are ready to provide the care that is needed at home. It means becoming active on the health and social issues of our times, whether through writing letters or emails to policymakers, writing a commentary for your community newspaper, organizing a boycott of an advertiser's product because of its imagery of nurses as sex objects, or other activity. There are too many issues for us to be active on them all. Choose the issues that are of greatest concern to you and act on these.

Finally, have a vision for nursing and healthcare, and be relentless about pursuing it. Think strategically about how to bring nursing's voice to decision-making tables in your workplace and public venues. Volunteer to serve on a committee or board that can further your vision. Do your homework and be better prepared than any other committee member for meetings. Don't be a wall-flower, but don't talk all the time either.

THINK STRATEGICALLY ABOUT HOW TO BRING NURSING'S VOICE TO DECISION-MAKING TABLES IN YOUR WORKPLACE AND PUBLIC VENUES.

important to pay attention to how we're presenting ourselves. This includes what you say, how you approach patients and families, and your workplace attire—please, no bellybuttons and cleavage on duty. It is offensive whenever any healthcare provider approaches me with the intention of touching me while wearing long fingernails that can harbor bacteria. That same offense carries on when someone does not introduce himself or herself by full name, or as "I'm Ms. Mason" or "I'm Nurse Mason and I'll be caring for you today."

Rather, think about and ask important questions to bring up issues that you think the group should consider. Sometimes the most important person at the table is the one who raised the question that no one had considered or that no one would say out loud. And always remind yourself that the reason to advance nursing and nurses is to be able to improve the care of patients and the health of families and communities. When we get stuck in service only to ourselves, we lose our souls and miss opportunities to lead with vision. ©