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Let’s Be Gentle With Ourselves and Each Other

Amy Gaylor

So far, this year has been brutal. All across the world, we are universally facing fear and suffering due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Nurses are on the front lines of this crisis. We are in the headlines and are hailed as heroes. We are getting lots of snacks and kind notes and pep talks. Some of us have also gotten dirty looks at the grocery store, as if we should only exist in the hospital saving lives.

But we are not all ICU nurses. And we feel guilty about what we cannot do and what we do not know and how we cannot help. We know that we are essential, but we feel that tension. Are we doing enough? Are we keeping our patients safe? Are we keeping our own families safe? Do our administrators have our best interests at heart? Are they telling us the truth? In the beginning, it felt like there were so many questions and no answers. But we are all doing the best we can, and we must realize that it is all we can do.

This is not a war, and there are no winners. When this is over, there will be politicians and hospitals that claim victory, but we know that thousands of lives will have been lost, and we will never be the same. No matter if we work in the ICU or if we are nurses in maternity care, home health, outpatient clinics, education, or myriad other specialties, we are being changed.

Nurses have long been guilty of having harsh opinions of nurses in other specialties or nurses who are inexperienced. But this pandemic has made it clear that we are all essential. Although (continued on page 307)
some administrators may believe that a nurse is a nurse is a nurse, we know that all nurses bring different experiences and expertise to the table . . . and we are all important, but not interchangeable.

During this time, let us decide together that we will support each other. That we will offer help in the ways that we can and stretch ourselves to learn more. That we will accept help and gladly teach those who lack experience. That we will prepare for the days ahead when our lives return to “normal,” but we are different. We know now that disaster planning is not just an online class to complete each year. Let’s resolve to get involved in preparation. We must do more than the minimum at our jobs.

Nurses are easily overlooked when we are absent from the boardroom and from the committees that make decisions. We must look for ways to get involved. Of course, committees are notorious for lots of useless meetings, but what if nurses show up? We are great at time management and prioritizing. Let’s lend our expertise to those making decisions for us. This is one way we can feel less isolated and gain some control. We can manage some of our anxiety and stress through action.

We are all suffering, and no one should feel that their pain does not matter

Throughout this pandemic and beyond, let’s be gentle with each other and with ourselves. We are all suffering, and no one should feel that their pain does not matter. Although we may see others whose situations seem worse, it is not a contest. Let’s allow ourselves to feel our feelings and allow others to feel theirs. We can emerge from this crisis with greater empathy and better understanding of ourselves.

We will have scars, and no one will escape unscathed. But we will also strive to remember the heroism and kindness we have seen. We will congratulate our communities on their unity in protecting each other and us. We will be more thankful for our teachers and truck drivers and all those we may have taken for granted. We will keep moving forward . . . together as nurses. NWH

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