



From Your ANA President

The value we bring

AS WE ARE REMINDED nearly every day, we're facing the toughest economic

times in decades. People are worrying about making their mortgage payments, hoping their cars will last just a little bit longer, and taking comparison-shopping to new heights. What they're searching for is value.

I don't pretend to have all the answers to fixing our economically stressed world, but I do know this: Nurses represent the best value in health care. And I mean that in the broadest way possible.

Every year nurses are recognized and celebrated during National Nurses Week, which is May 6 to 12. Patients and their families frequently express their appreciation for our high level of care and our high level of caring. But it's still vitally important for each and every one of us to be able to explain why having a nurse at the bedside or in the community matters—to our employers, to policy makers, and especially to the public.

First and foremost, at ANA we believe our value lies in our ability to keep patients safe. Nurses are there for patients 24/7, and our unique skills and perspective distinguish us from other care providers.

Beyond performing planned patient care, we constantly assess and monitor patients for any detrimental change in their condition before it spirals out of control. It's our analytical and decision-making skills that allow us to do this, and scientific evidence backs us up on our vital contribution to quality and, in many cases, life-saving care.

Study after study has shown that when there are more nurses on the floor, patients fare better. We prevent such complications as urinary and respiratory infections, pressure ulcers, and falls—which means patients go home quicker. Our vigilance saves lives both by detecting those subtle changes in our patients and by catching potential medical errors. For example, one groundbreaking study by a prominent nurse researcher found that surgical patients in hospitals where nurses carried a patient load of eight patients had a 31% greater risk of dying within a month than those in hospitals where the patient load was four.

We really are our patients' last line of defense, and we take that responsibility seriously.

Because of our round-the-clock presence, it is nurses in whom the patients and their families confide. This re-

lationship of trust allows us to get more in-depth information, which improves care. If we discover that our patients' wants and needs aren't being met, we serve as their advocate.

To me, those differences alone show our incredible value to individual patients and to society. But in this economically strapped environment, nurses need to be able to talk about how we are also cost-effective. As nurses, we have always been highly resourceful—improvising in emergency situations and fulfilling employer edicts to do “more with less” as part of our everyday work.

Current research shows that having sufficient nurse staffing saves money. The Economic Value of Professional Nursing study (available online at www.lww-medicalcare.com) demonstrates that as nurse staffing levels increase, patient risk of complications and hospital length of stay decrease, resulting in medical cost-savings, improved national productivity, and lives saved. Medical savings alone are estimated at \$6.1 billion or \$46,000 a year for each RN added to the nursing workforce on a clinical unit. And nurses are going to be even more important to their hospitals' financial bottom lines now that the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services no longer will be reimbursing hospitals when patients develop certain complications.

The value of nurses was recognized by President Obama and federal lawmakers when they worked for and enacted the economic stimulus package earlier this year. The package includes substantial funding for a range of healthcare programs that ANA and nurses nationwide support—from wellness and prevention programs to community health centers. Moreover, \$200 million will go toward key healthcare workforce development programs, including nursing.

So to me, ANA's theme for National Nurses Week, “Nurses: Building a Healthy America,” seems incredibly apt. We have the skills and abilities to build a health system that provides quality care when times are tough and when they are not. We always are there when our patients need us. And, we are always value-added.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rebecca M Patton RN".

Rebecca M. Patton, MSN, RN, CNOR
President
American Nurses Association