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## From the editor

Nursing has a long and fascinating history of involvement in community and environmental health. We are at least superficially aware of this background; most of us realize the significant contributions of Florence Nightingale to improving the health status of the environment. However, we generally are not aware of the great contributions of women in nursing to the health and welfare of communities. In fact, great nurse leaders such as Lillian Wald and Margaret Sanger are today thought of as social reformers or social workers, not as nurses, because of their monumental work on behalf of the health of their communities, both locally and nationally.

At the heart of any action that leads to improvement of community and environmental health is political activity. Nurses who have participated in significant social reform have recognized this fact. Florence Nightingale was a valued advisor to the political leaders in England during her long and productive life. Lillian Wald was president of the American Union Against Militarism, the parent organization of the American Civil Liberties Union. Wilma Scott Heide was the first president of the National Organization for Women. These are not the only examples of nurses who have engaged in important political activity during their time, nor are these the only political activities in which each of these women en-

gaged. As we continue to discover our history in nursing, we will find abundant evidence showing the participation of the nursing profession in the political process at various levels.

Political activity and scholarship, paradoxically, go hand in hand. The discovery of knowledge or the creation of insight into the human condition is essential for effective political action. Likewise, effective political action is often a precursor of the social and political support needed to pursue avenues of inquiry that might otherwise go unexplored. Because Florence Nightingale recognized this fact, she not only admonished nurses to develop a body of knowledge, but she created approaches to the analysis of scientific data that were supportive of the political and social arguments that she used to gain reform.

In this day of great social change and with the opportunity to create significant social reform, I hope that nurses everywhere will respond to the challenge of our predecessors. More than ever before, we need to collectively combine the best of our political and scientific abilities so that we can go forth as a significant force in improving health in communities and environments.

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