
From the editor

AWAKE AWAKE

With what labour women have toiled to break down all individual and independent life, in order to fit themselves for this social and domestic existence, thinking it right! And when they have killed themselves to do it, they have awakened (too late) to think it wrong.^{1(p42)}

Awake, ye women, all ye that sleep, awake!^{1(p32)}

What are we to do in a society that creates conditions in which illness and stress thrive—a society in which we must struggle to gain and maintain whole and vibrant bodies, minds, and spirits? As nurses we are assaulted by the multiple stressors derived from a system that generates many of the problems it alleges to “cure,” the stressors that accompany those for whom we provide care, and the challenges of our own day-to-day realities. It is no wonder we sometimes feel and act like the “walking dead.”

Much of the “scientific” work that has been done to date that informs our understanding of the stress response in humans was in fact done at the expense of animal “subjects,” beings many view as less than worthy of our caring and sympathy. Rather than providing the understanding and wisdom needed to address real human stress and suffering, such work generates a deeply embedded poverty of the human spirit, weakening our ability to respond in ways that engender stronger human capacities. When we can begin to cease all forms of erosion of the human spirit, compassion, and caring, and find approaches that yield not only scientific knowledge but also substantive wisdom and compassionate understanding, we will be on the path to healing the great wounds of our present social and health care systems.

We are not culpable for creating the conditions of the system in which we live and work,

but we can turn away from various forms of cooptation. We can begin to understand the ways in which respect for life is eroded, care-less animal experimentation, human experimentation done in the name of treatment, demand for payment above the concern for the needs of those ill equipped to pay, and so on. Then we will begin to see ways to use our new technologies for greater good—as substitutes for the abuse and use of animals and humans, rather than as tools for their maltreatment and destruction.

As painful as it is to wake up to some of the realities of the world around us, we can no longer afford to acquiesce to situations that continue to erode the human spirit. The health care system is placing increasing stress on those of us who form the core of the work power in the system. The shortage of prepared nurses affects all of us adversely, as does the runaway technology blitz, the increasing demand for rapidly acquiring and using new performance skills, and the unceasing demands of ethical decisions and actions. We can gain at least a temporary measure of comfort by pretending that all these problems do not exist or that the situation is not so bad, but eventually the walking dead approach takes its toll. For our own health and well-being, we must awaken, cease being the walking dead, embrace vibrant awareness, and take substantial action for the good of the earth and all living creatures. Now is the time.

REFERENCE

1. Nightingale, F: *Cassandra* (1852 essay published with an introduction by M Stark and epilogue by C MacDonald). New York, The Feminist Press, 1979.

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