
From the editor

AN OPEN LETTER TO MY COLLEAGUES

Dear colleagues,

Not long ago at a small faculty gathering, we had an interesting and informative discussion about "mistakes." Acting on a conversation with Dr Elizabeth Berrey, in Buffalo, New York (Spring 1988), I had suggested that we explore ways to nurture a "spirit of generosity" among ourselves, and between ourselves and our students so that when we made mistakes, we could all help each other to learn and grow, rather than giving one another grief. Someone wisely called for caution in using pejorative labels like the word "mistake," and noted that perhaps in part, some of the "problems" come from just that sort of labeling. I acknowledge the wisdom of this caution. I am moved to address how we can create new ways of relating to one another, and new ways of thinking about the problems we encounter together.

In fact, a central crisis in education, as in health care, involves the nature of relationships between people. Each of us describes the patterns of relationship a bit differently, attributing causes or motivations to various circumstances, and continuing to get caught up in the same old patterns despite our despair that they persist. At the risk of oversimplifying, one version of the pattern goes like this: someone does something that presents an occasion for ruffled feelings, pain, distress, shock, or some other uncomfortable response in someone else. In offices and rooms behind closed doors, or in the hallways in whispered tones, the explanations and accusations start swirling until finally either folks get tired of the commotion and move on, or the offending party makes some atonement. And the cycle starts all over again.

It only takes a few different responses to break a cycle like this. Different responses will come from clarity of vision that we hold in common about what we seek for our future together. This is not a small concern. Our willingness to confront difficult relational situations openly means that we are willing to step to the heart of what plagues all communities—at home and internationally—in addressing the most difficult of challenges for the

future. Simply put, the challenge is how to interact with one another with integrity, preserve our resources, and move into a life-affirming future together as a diverse world community. As nurse participants in the provision of health care, we are centrally situated in the quest for more humane and accessible health care for all, and it seems to me that as we learn to treat one another more humanely, we will also learn something about possibilities for a new health care system.

And so, any individual "mistake," or attempts that fail, or explorations in seeking solutions to problems that fall short, could provide an opportunity for us all to move to a different level of discourse. The response that I am seeking for myself and for our community is to move away from patterns that create further misunderstanding, to move away from litanies of woe over lack of trust or other shortcomings, to move away from casting shadows of blame over one another. I seek responses that move toward creating understanding, discussions that build trust and appreciation of diversity, and that illuminate the circumstances surrounding the choices we make from day to day.

My desire is to acknowledge both the realities and the perceptions of what happens in our shared experiences, to draw forth an image of what might have happened instead, and to practice the skills of relation that move us toward our vision of possibility. We can learn to practice the art of constructive criticism and self-criticism.¹ Together, we can consciously choose what we wish to replicate. As we begin to envision new possibilities for our day-to-day relations with one another, we will begin to also envision a future we prefer, and we can begin to create that future.

REFERENCE

1. Wheeler CE, Chinn PL. *Peace and Power: A Handbook of Feminist Process*. New York, NY: National League for Nursing, 1991.

—Peggy L. Chinn, RN, PhD, FAAN
Editor