

President's Keynote

Rising Together

NTI 2024
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INTRODUCTION

Hello! Welcome to Denver and to our celebration of 50 years of NTI!

That’s five decades of education, inspiration and Rising Together, sharing our stories, advancing and defining our profession, and making a profound difference.

Last year, I spoke about the sea change in nursing we had just experienced. That change is not just a moment in history; it’s a continual movement.

This year, we embrace that wave of change, looking forward to the next 50 years and a shared commitment to shaping the future of healthcare while driving nursing excellence and modeling the very humanity of caring.

ONE DAY AT A TIME

Abraham Lincoln said, “The best thing about the future is that it comes one day at a time.” And that’s how we accomplish change. In small increments.

One tiny idea reverberates and has great impact. That’s the Butterfly Effect: The mere flutter of a butterfly’s wings can have a profound influence on the atmosphere around it, causing ripples that spread across many shores, leading to monumental change.

THE NEXT 50 YEARS

To begin our next 50 years, we have updated our mission statement: It now declares that “AACN drives excellence in acute and critical care for nurses, patients and families.”

This mission guides our work, goals and future. Every day and every night, nurses lead with clinical expertise, humanity and compassion, making a difference in the lives we touch.

And the world is taking notice:

- AARP
- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
- Edwards Lifesciences Foundation
- National Academy of Medicine
- FDA

These groups have invited AACN and our community of exceptional nurses to partner as thought leaders and innovators – to create and sustain healthy and equitable work environments.

GUIDING OUR PATH

This year, at AACN chapters across the country, I've met nurses who gave voice to their staffing struggles. I've also felt the energy of new ideas for clinical transformation to meet the needs of our changing healthcare environments.

For example, virtual nurse models are growing rapidly, and direct care nurses are guiding our path.

We're building new, innovative nursing models to ease the burden of work for our front-line teams so they can focus on the integral aspects of patient care that only they can provide.

It is fundamentally important that direct care nurses – from recent graduates to seasoned professionals – participate in designing and shaping the future of nursing.

Right now, Rising Together our teams must be keenly engaged in healthcare transformation to co-create the changes needed to guide us forward.

VOICE, VALUE, VULNERABILITY

Being open to change is important.

Back in 2001, two weeks after 9/11, I was part of a group of nurses who addressed members of Congress about what we experienced on that tragic day and in the aftermath.

We understood the importance of speaking about our profession, our fears, our courage and our accomplishments, and to affirm boldly how much nurses contribute to society – not only during a crisis but every day.

During the COVID-19 crisis, we rose again to give voice to nurses' value and to our vulnerability, to remind the world that each nurse's well-being is integral to the well-being of each member of society.

NEW SOLUTIONS

And recently, I was part of an accelerator program where novice-to-expert interdisciplinary teams participated in projects to create innovative ideas to lift the burden of work for direct care nurses – ideas such as the virtual nurse model and a project to streamline documentation.

At the table, these teams created a circle of shared knowledge and experience. They collaborated with IT and informatics nurses, and technology companies that could immediately innovate and co-create solutions as ideas emerged.

This is exciting work we can do together to be inspired and truly impact and optimize our work environments and, in turn, patient outcomes.

Using our bold voices, talents and confidence, we can each be part of teams that discover new solutions and accelerate excellence for the next 50 years.

I love these programs. I could talk about them all day. And nurses I've met are eager to hear more.

If you want to learn how to start them at your hospital, email me at risingtogether@aacn.org.

STAFFING STANDARDS

At a recent AACN town hall on staffing, you described how frequent turnover has impacted your teams and units, because it takes time to establish a rhythm, trust and shared expertise.

For decades, AACN has advocated for safe staffing. Now, we have developed and declared definitive standards!

Just last month, we published "AACN Standards for Appropriate Staffing in Adult Critical Care." We are among the few nursing specialties that have boldly defined what is essential to delivering optimal patient outcomes while also supporting the well-being of nurses.

Staffing is more than numbers. We must have the resources we need, and we must staff in a way that matches nurses' skills to their patients' needs.

We need hospital leaders who value nurse staffing as an investment, not an expense – an investment in patient safety and better outcomes, as well as an investment in nurse retention, nurse safety and nurse well-being.

TEAMWORK

I'd like to share a quote and a story.

Maya Angelou said: "Courage is the most important of all the virtues because without courage you can't practice any other virtue consistently."

Many years ago, I had my first whitewater rafting experience on the Upper Gauley in West Virginia. If you know anything about whitewater rafting, you know that category 5 rapids are no joke! They are unpredictable and high stress.

On our way to the river, the guide said, "If you've never been whitewater rafting, this is not the river to learn on."

I had never been whitewater rafting.

But other members of my team were highly skilled. I trusted that they had my back. When we went down the category 5 waterfall, we kept our raft steady. We even rescued another team who had capsized.

Knowing I had a strong team of nurses on the raft gave me the confidence to brave that river. It took teamwork, collaboration and skilled communication.

And that's essential in our practice, too.

SHARING KNOWLEDGE

As novice nurses begin their practice and continue to enter high-stakes environments in ICUs, it's important that experienced nurses support them so they can thrive.

I often hear that the new generation of nurses isn't engaged. I don't see it that way. I see it as a challenge for us all to own.

Let's find a way to speak to the soul and listen to the heart of the next generation of nurses, so they feel included and eager to be involved.

Our opportunity to mentor the next generation of nurses is a fundamental role we must play. We have a duty to share our knowledge and expertise.

Looking around here today, I see so many young nurses answering the call, stepping up and ready to rise in this profession – ready to learn and innovate.

We must also be open to learning from them, to build the circle of shared knowledge. Our profession depends on it.

SHARED GOVERNANCE

It depends on great leadership, too.

Being a leader in today's high-stakes healthcare environment presents new challenges. Nurses feel valued when leaders authentically lead units with a collaborative model based on shared knowledge, goals and respect.

Shared governance models enhance effective decision-making and true collaboration at the point of care.

Rising Together, we can bridge generational gaps, and create dynamic, inclusive nursing communities and healthy work environments.

HEALTHY WORK ENVIRONMENTS

The AACN community has done amazing work this year to accelerate implementation of our Healthy Work Environment Standards, using CSI methodology to assist clinical teams with planning and sustaining the six HWE standards.

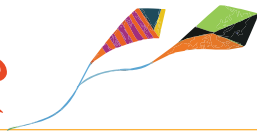
This spring, AACN's National HWE Collaborative is using implementation science to bring the HWE standards to 135 units across 45 hospital systems nationwide. This pioneering program leverages proven implementation science that creates sustainable change.

This year, we have also partnered with the AARP Foundation and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation as part of the Future of Nursing: Campaign for Action.

The Health Equity and Nursing Innovations Fund is a groundbreaking program that provides funds for innovative solutions to:

- Create systemic change
- Strengthen and diversify the nursing workforce
- Expand nurse recruitment and retention strategies
- Create and sustain healthy work environments

I'm looking forward to NTI 2025 when we can share the stories our community is creating right now!



LOOKING FORWARD

But we cannot look forward without looking back. Last year, I shared my story of the loss of my husband, Ed, and how family visitation policies affected my experience.

There has been progress in family visitation in critical moments. However, we still have a long way to go to create the best outcomes for patients and families.

Last year, I also lost my beautiful mother, Delia. She had Alzheimer's for more than two decades.

In her final hours, we shared moments of laughter and tears, sorrow and joy. My mom had the most beautiful and gentle death. As nurses, we are so honored to be present when our patients enter and leave this world.

This is a reminder of how valuable and meaningful our role is.

What we do matters!

RISING TOGETHER

Many of you have had similar losses.

Sharing our stories, we help each other through our grief journey to find hope for a brighter future.

I believe we nurses suffer from cumulative loss, especially after COVID-19. It's important to acknowledge the complexity of cumulative grief.

By recognizing the importance of caring for ourselves, we understand how to care for each other.

And, as we celebrate NTI's 50th anniversary, we acknowledge that our COVID-19 experience has made a lasting impression that we can use as a catalyst for change today and tomorrow.

As we faced the pressure of the pandemic on the frontlines of healthcare, we were Rising Together.

Every shift, we knew we were facing challenges that we'd never seen before. We emerged. We evolved.

Let's continue to face the future with courage and curiosity, and let the theme of Rising Together be our guiding light.

THE IMPACT OF HUMOR

I have a funny story to share ...

Some of you know I'm from a family of 10 children. In my early years, I grew up in a row house in Philadelphia.

One day, when I was 9, my father painted the garage floor. It was perfect.

I'm not sure how this happened, but someone (maybe me!) told my younger siblings to run across the wet paint.

Pretty soon, seven of us were running across the wet paint, laughing and thoroughly enjoying the moment.



There were footprints everywhere. It was a disaster! And it was hilarious! We knew my father would be unhappy, but we took the risk.

After all these years, this memory has stayed with me. And it always makes me laugh!

I enjoy laughter. It's a way to relieve stress, to pause and see things differently.

It's important to appreciate the impact of humor. It can change the course of our day, our lives and even the lives of others.

We also can't be afraid to take risks as professionals to drive positive change.

To transform healthcare, we will need to take some risks to ensure that we have a bold, confident voice at the table of change.

THE FUTURE OF NURSING

The landscape of healthcare is ever-changing. As nurses, we are uniquely positioned to not only navigate these changes but also to be the architects of the future we envision.

Our book is not written, and our story is not yet fully told.

In the next chapters of our story ...

Let's bring gratitude and passion to our work environments and mentor new nurses so they will want to stay and learn and grow.

Let's connect with families and patients in ways that leave a memorable imprint on their lives.

One day at a time, Rising Together, let's continue this journey with collective momentum, bringing positive change to all we touch.

In this room: We are the future of nursing.

Here's to the next 50 years!

We've got this!