I hope all of you had a wonderful holiday season. I know many of you worked throughout the holidays because patient care continues around the clock, so thank you for what you give to patients each day. Once again, Gallup poll results (Norman, 2016) have demonstrated nursing is the most trusted profession. Interestingly, another portion of the poll indicates people do not see us as decision makers. Really? Think about all the patient care decisions you make every day that seriously affect the quality and safety of patient care.

Suzanne Gordon, a journalist who has spent much of her career writing about nurses and nursing, reminds us that many people do not understand what we do (Buresh & Gordon, 2013). So, being trusted does not by itself help the public have a better understanding of what we do. Unless there is a nurse in someone’s family or a very meaningful experience with a nurse, the public also does not understand the extent of our education. They are unaware of the math and science courses required to become a nurse. Furthermore, they have no idea what an advanced practice nurse can do even when being treated by one. Some of this is our fault; for example, I was treated recently by a certified registered nurse anesthetist who did not communicate that he was a nurse until I asked some specific questions. We subsequently had a polite chat about that.

Educating the Public and Other Professionals

In general, nurses have an identity problem with the public and the work of medical-surgical nurses clearly is not understood, even by other healthcare professionals. As president of AMSN, I often interact with the public and journalists. It is not unusual for me to be asked, “How do you like working in the operating room?” You see, they focus on the surgical part – sometimes they ask me how I like caring for surgical patients – but almost never do they address the “medical” part of medical-surgical nursing. Many of you may have had similar experiences explaining what you do to friends and family. Because of this issue, the AMSN Board of Directors asked a task force of members to create a definition of medical-surgical nursing as well as an elevator speech we all can use when interacting with the public. This task was harder than it sounds and subsequently the task force, board members, and AMSN staff have completed these documents.

Soon you will be receiving this definition via email and it will be placed on the AMSN website. Please use it to explain proudly in layman’s terms what we do. Take every opportunity to help the public understand we are highly educated clinicians who have the most responsibility and around-the-clock accountability for patient safety and quality of care. After all, people are admitted to the hospital because they need nursing care! We are decision makers and highly skilled coordinators of care. We troubleshoot physician orders, medications, and technology while attempting to provide psychosocial support and interact with family members. We also coordinate the patient’s care with other members of the interprofessional team. To help you speak intelligently about what nurses do, a short chart on the AMSN (2017) website contains pro-nursing language along with a link to a complimentary webinar presented on the power of words.

Sharing Your Pride

Because it is imperative the public and our professional colleagues understand what we do, my “ask” of you for 2017 is to help me explain to them what we nurses do, especially medical-surgical nurses. No one else will do this for us. I am proud to be a nurse and I wouldn’t have chosen another career. You, the members of AMSN, have many reasons to be proud of what you do each day as nurses. Please use the AMSN definition of medical-surgical nursing, pro-nursing language, and the elevator speech with your families and communities. Being the most trusted profession year after year means nothing if the public doesn’t understand what we really do!

REFERENCES

