

From Darkness Into Light

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Change is as inevitable as the beginning of a new year. Health care is always evolving, and there are new discoveries that will be made in the upcoming year that will change the lives of our patients and their families.

I write this on a very dark morning at 6 am, here in my office in Canada, just above the 49th parallel. Winter is coming but this year, thanks to El Niño, we have no snow at the midpoint of November. My office is likely the only one lit in the whole building; I work in an ambulatory cancer center, and nothing or nobody stirs here until 7 am most days. There are 41 days until the winter solstice on December 21, and each day grows perceptibly

shorter until I find myself in the dark on my way to and from work. I do not like these short days, but there is January and February to look forward to, when the dark starts to recede, ever so slowly.

When this issue reaches your mailboxes, I hope you will notice the change in the length and quality of the light wherever you are.

However, this is also a time of joy, where many of us find ways to celebrate life, family, and good fortune. The Christmas decorations will go up soon (and it seems sooner every year), and all over the United States and Canada, houses and stores will shimmer and glow with colorful baubles and twinkling lights. Our family celebrates Chanukah, and, for eight nights, we will light candles, starting with just one lonely flicker and ending with the menorah ablaze with all eight candles glowing. Some of our Hindu,

Sikh, Jain, and Buddhist friends and colleagues celebrate Diwali around this time with bright colors and fireworks lighting up the dark sky.

I find myself introspective at this time of year. Perhaps it is the long hours of darkness that lend themselves to deep thoughts, or perhaps it is the end of one year and the start of another that prompts me to reflect on past achievements and plans for what comes next. I have been thinking a lot about two friends that I lost to cancer in 2015—one in the cold days of early January and the other as spring first started to show herself between the piles of dirty snow and ice. They had both lived good lives, productive and loving lives, but lives too short for their friends and families, and their passing has left a space in my life that echoes with their voices and wise words.

I do not make New Year's resolutions as a rule, but I have to admit that there is something about the prospect of starting again with a 12-page calendar of promise and hope open on my desk. How will I fill the days and weeks and months? What projects will I complete? Two new books started in 2015 are at the top of the list. What new ones will I dream up? My husband has a milestone birthday six weeks into the new year, and I have seen my friends and colleagues take stock and make significant life changes based on reaching that age. What will that mean to me, other than being married to an "older" man?

The political landscape stands on the brink of change too. In Canada, we recently elected a new government

with a young prime minister who is already leading us from a place of darkness into the dawning of a new era where the Canada that I chose to live in will be restored. My friends and colleagues from the United States face their own electoral choices, and no matter who ends up in government, changes will follow.

Change is as inevitable as the beginning of a new year. Health care is always evolving, and there are new discoveries that will be made in the upcoming year that

will change the lives of our patients and their families. There will be new treatments discovered, and older ones will be modified and made better and more effective. Some of those discoveries will hopefully be published in the pages of this journal. This journal represents the many ways that nurses make a difference in the lives of individuals diagnosed with cancer. We are the researchers who describe phenomena that clarify the patient experience and

shine a spotlight on interventions that make a difference, however small or large. We are the educators and explainers of complex concepts made simpler and more understandable in the crisis of diagnosis. For so many of our patients, nurses are the light in the middle of a dark night when fears and uncertainty threaten the confidence of the daylight hours. As the new year dawns in your life and work, how will you make your light shine on those around you?