Giving Ourselves a Pat on the Back

It occurred to me recently that most oncology nurses probably have little appreciation for the extraordinary work that they do every day. The work is, after all, their job—that which they have been educated and trained to do, that which they have chosen to do. To most outsiders, however, this casual expertise, the seamless care given to each patient, is beyond comprehension and valued more than we know. What oncology nurse has not been asked, “How do you do what you do?” Although we realize that oncology nursing is not for everyone, our response to this question usually is filled with a genuine humility of the real specialness of the role.

Recently, some ONS staff members asked for help in encouraging our members to contribute more nominations for the many awards that ONS has established for oncology nurses. A list of these awards, descriptions, and the details of the nomination process can be found in this issue. “Everyday Heroes” seems to say it all. We quietly and competently go about our daily duties without realizing that the job has heroic proportions. It is time for that to change.

Every one of us could put a face with each of those awards. If each of us picked just one award and committed ourselves to completing a nomination, we would only begin to scratch the surface. Recognizing the job we do and its value to us and the public we serve can begin internally. The awards offer us a way to, quite literally, give ourselves a well-deserved pat on the back.

Over the years, I have heard many reasons why nominations are often so few in number. They include excuses such as: “I don’t know anybody.” “Awards are only for the ‘big name’ members.” “The nomination process is too long and cumbersome.” “My candidate would never have a chance against all of the other nominees.” Very little truth exists in these beliefs. Regardless of our settings, we are surrounded by deserving nominees. Although some awards do recognize a virtual lifetime of work and contributions, the majority are for contributions made day by day in almost invisible ways. For many of the awards, the qualifications are achieved in a short period of time and in the course of everyday work. The nomination process varies among awards, and, yes, the process does take some time and thought, but most are fairly streamlined and can be completed within a few hours. What better way to spend a few hours than recognizing friends or colleagues for the professionalism that they bring to their work? The reality is that the competition for an award is only as stiff as we are willing to make it. Many awards receive only a few nominations each year, and if you are not successful one year, you may resubmit the following year. Besides, the honor really is in the nomination. Winning is great, but do not underestimate the recognition that comes to an individual simply by virtue of the nomination and having the chance to enjoy the appreciation of coworkers.

I urge each of you to look through the insert in this issue and nominate one or more colleagues for an award this year and every year. The groundswell of appreciation for the work you do will benefit us all.

In Memoriam

As we went to press with this issue, news reached us that our colleague, Kathleen Jennings-Dozier, PhD, MPH, RN, CS, lost her own battle with cancer. Kathleen was an author of a number of articles and a member of the Oncology Nursing Forum Review Board. Her commitment to nursing and sharing her expertise with her colleagues was notable. Even in the throes of dealing with her illness, she wondered how she might reach others with her experiences. She was a bright young star, and she will be missed. Our prayers and condolences go to her family, particularly her husband and young daughter. Good-bye, Kathleen, and God bless.