

Professional Aging

A T-shirt advertised in one of my catalogs caught my eye immediately. “You might be older than dirt if . . .,” the shirt screamed out. Following this headline was a list that could only make me smile. It included long-ago memories such as “You remember candy cigarettes,” “You owned a pair of P.F. Flyers,” and, my personal favorite, “You collected S&H green stamps.” Not only do I remember those candy cigarettes, but I also remember the way they tasted, not to mention the taste of the green stamps that needed to be licked and pasted into endless books before redeeming for all of those treasures.

The truth is that we need no reminders of how much things have changed and how very different today’s world is. In the context of professional nursing, the topic of the aging profession and the ways in which the new generation of nurses differs from what was familiar to many of us in the “old guard” has come up in many recent conversations. We are told that these young nurses approach life quite differently than most of us who are older than a certain age, have a different work ethic, learn differently, and have a different approach to the world and their role in it. We are told that what has worked for us for years in our professional publications will not work for them and that we need to reinvent our products to attract their attention.


I have had to think a great deal about these issues lately, and, slowly, my thoughts and concerns have begun to take shape. Hardly an editorial meeting has gone by in recent years without a discussion about how to draw readers to our journal. We are told that the new generation of nurses likes their information delivered quickly and succinctly, that they have neither the time nor the desire to sit and

read at length, that their work lives are full and complex, and that nursing jobs today are so demanding that little time or energy is left at the end of the day for professional reading. In reaction, we have tried to streamline the flow of professional literature with substantive abstracts, key points, removable cover sheets that highlight articles of interest, and online access. Other journals have tried shorter articles, more features, more color, more pictures, more JAZZ.

In all of these efforts to figure out how we can change the journal to suit the learning styles of young nurses, we often forget to ask ourselves what we might need to do to also change them. I am not saying that we do not need to stay in touch with the changing world and our changing audience, but I do wonder if we are too quick to assume that we are the ones who have to do all the changing. Commercial publications need to stay on the edge, always attuned to their audience, continually adapting to what is current and trendy, but our professional journals are not commercial publications. Have we been trying too hard to apply commercial marketing techniques to our professional publications? In our rush to apply these techniques, have we lost sight of the fact that our journals serve a grander purpose than commercial publications? In pandering to the snappy, quickly evolving lifestyles of Generations X and Y, are we shortchanging professional nursing?

The February issue of the *ONS News* highlighted the topic of mentoring and the ways in which mentoring is key to professional development. Our own Leadership and Professional Development feature in this very issue (see p. 205) also addresses the topic. As our nursing leaders and clinical experts continue

to age and retire, it is imperative that their skills and wisdom be passed along to those who will take their place. Do we not owe it to these up-and-coming new nurses to socialize them to some of the traditional professional values as much as to those skills and all that wisdom? I am referring, of course, to the rich tradition of professional reading and self-education and personal development, to the need to take personal responsibility for staying current, to an understanding that nursing is hard work, but a professional accepts that responsibility with the privilege of calling oneself a registered nurse.

So, I say to all of you who question whether the work we do nurturing authors and publishing research and scholarly articles is relevant to you and your idea of the nursing profession, consider meeting us halfway. We will continue to produce a readable, pleasing, scientifically sound publication, but it will be professional literature, not *O* or *Cosmopolitan*. Our goal is not to entertain or to make professional reading fun. The work that we do is serious and relevant to what you do every day, caring for patients with cancer. We need to do a better job of helping you see and understand that relevance in the hope that many of you will come to appreciate the value of professional literature and commit yourselves to reading and using it even though it takes a concerted effort. The day will come when you will be the mentors to a new generation of nurses. Professional nursing literature will be there to support your efforts if you take the time to use and value it now. 

Digital Object Identifier: 10.1188/06.ONF.191