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Can't Pay Us to Care

Mary Satre, MSN, MBA, RN, CNA President



A television series called "800 Words" is about a journalist from Sydney, Australia, writing a weekly column from his former hometown in New Zealand, to which he has returned with his children. The unfolding action mirrors the words he writes. He ends each episode by achieving the exact number of words as his drama of the moment concludes.

Each time I write this column I feel a bit like that journalist, trying to fit the rapidly moving world of health care into just a few words.

The United States spends a higher proportion of its GDP on healthcare than any other country. Data published by KFF in 2022 shows that despite recent fluctuations our country continues to spend more than other high-income countries (<https://www.healthsystemtracker.org/chart-collection/health-spending-u-s-compare-countries/#Health%20expenditures%20as%20percent%20of%20GDP%201970-2022>). But not everyone in this country has equitable access to care.

Health care is not a partisan topic. I cannot fully explain why it becomes so when addressed in the legislature. I know nurses with wide-ranging political points of view who nevertheless agree on what constitutes good health care.

Nurses will be tested in the months to come, and more than ever we need to support each other and stand on the foundation of work already completed by strong nurses. All people are entitled to comprehensive health care and all that it entails. On that the directives of our profession are clear. ANA published a position paper in 2016 entitled "The Nurse's Role in Ethics and Human Rights: Protecting and Promoting Individual Worth, Dignity, and Human Rights in Practice Settings" (<https://www.nursingworld.org/globalassets/docs/ana/ethics/ethics-and-human-rights-protecting-and-promoting->

[final-formatted-20161130.pdf](#)). It draws on the 2015 ANA Code of Ethics to state that "The American Nurses Association believes that respect for the inherent dignity, worth, unique attributes, and human rights of all individuals is a fundamental principle." The following points are not comprehensive, but illustrate the application of the 2016 position paper in specific ways relevant to CNA:

- Through their professional organization, nurses must reaffirm and strengthen nursing values and ideals with a united voice that interprets and explains the place and role of nursing in society (ANA, 2015).
- Nurse educators embrace the concepts of justice and caring as guiding principles in teaching students about ethics and human rights within the provision of health care everywhere — from local communities to the greater global community.
- Nurse researchers conduct research that is relevant to communities of interest, are guided by participation of these communities in identifying research problems, and strive to benefit patients, society, and professional practice.
- Nurse administrators incorporate ethics and human rights principles into practice by monitoring the practice environment for actual or potential human rights violations of patients, nurses, and other workers in the health care environment.

On February 18th at our annual Nurses Day at the Capitol, we had a chance to ask Lieutenant Governor Dianne Primavera about the future of Medicaid in Colorado. She stressed the basic human right that all have to health care.

Rumors are rife at the time of this writing. With cuts to the federal government, Medicaid, Medicare, and even Social Security are facing uncertain futures. In December of 2016 then ANA President Dr. Pamela Cipriano wrote a letter to then President-Elect Trump urging him to "ensure universal access to a standard

(Continued on page 9)

Recent Legislative, Judicial, and Executive Actions Impacting Education and Public Health

The quality and safety of schools nationwide have been impacted by, among others, the rescission of the 2021 Guidelines for Enforcement Actions in or Near Protected Areas that prohibited Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents into schools and other areas previously designated as protected, and the U.S. Department of Education's sweeping 'Dear Colleague' letter to educational institutions ordering a halt to all diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives (AFT, 2025; NAFSA, 2025).

In response to directives to halt DEI initiatives, the American Federation of Teachers, AFT-Maryland, and the American Sociological Association have filed a lawsuit and Denver Public Schools became the first school district to sue the administration over the allowance of ICE agents in schools (AP, 2025; Shauneen, 2025).

Thus far, the Colorado Department of Education has maintained availability of their public DEI resources in support of Colorado's underrepresented populations.

Introduced legislation related to education in Colorado's State Legislature thus far includes:

- SB25-123- Education Curriculum on Genocide Against Native Americans
- HB25-1061- Community Schoolyards Grant Program
- HB25-1149- Comprehensive Black History and Culture Education in K-12
- HB25-1248- Protect Students from Restraint and Seclusion Act
- HB25-1250- Gun Violence Prevention and Parents of Students
- HB25-1274- Healthy School Meals for All Program

Challenges and Collaborative Opportunities

These challenges highlight the importance of a collaborative, multi-disciplinary approach in addressing the broader factors that influence public health on local, state, and federal levels. Nurses may utilize their unique skillset to collaborate with ed-

ucators, multi-disciplinary health professionals, and community organizations to advocate that schools are places of learning and, therefore, also spaces where students' health and well-being are prioritized. ■

References online:

myamericannurse.com/?p=417465



(continued from page 2)

package of essential health care services for all citizens and residents." She stressed the expansion of Medicaid "as a safety net for the most vulnerable, including the chronically ill, elderly and poor." This letter can be found on ANA's website.

I haven't even touched on the continued creation of a diverse workforce to care for diverse patients. There is so much

to say! And as it is in our professional purview to care for others, we have no choice but to stand up for them and for each other.

Money, or the lack of it, has always been a catalyst for the American Health Care system. I have often said that while you can pay someone to do a job, you cannot pay them to care. Nurses just do it. It is our most unique superpower. ■