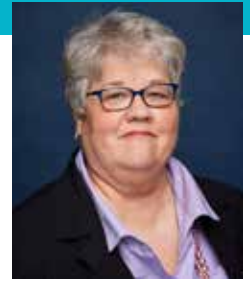


PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

What Can We All Do?

Rebecca M. Patton, DNP, RN, CNOR, FAAN



As I started this letter, I was having difficulty putting behind me the constant news about the troubles and conflicts our society is facing. Every day brings new events, new debates, and new questions about our rights and responsibilities as citizens. I finally realized that, as a nurse and as a representative of Ohio nurses, I might find insights and guidance from our Code of Ethics (ANA, 2025).

It doesn't take long watching the news to become so troubled that one just wants to turn away. I consider myself one of the lucky ones: I am a US citizen, my family is safe, I am employed, I have health insurance, and I can afford food and housing. I don't have to worry about my family disappearing in the middle of the night, I don't have to choose between filling my medication prescriptions and buying gas for the car to get to work, and I've never experienced discrimination because of my birthplace, religion, ethnicity, or another personal trait.

These issues seem so overwhelming, so large, and so separated from my day-to-day experience. It could be easy to watch the news, shake my head, and think "these things are terrible - they shouldn't happen in America," and then go back to getting my lecture ready for the next day's class. But surely that can't be right, can't be what it means to be a responsible citizen, and surely it is not consistent with the values of nursing.

As a nurse, I am committed not just to my paid nursing position but also to my broadly defined community. The Code speaks to that. We have responsibility, but more importantly, we have a part in addressing the broken world. All of us need to step up.

As nurses, our practice is guided by the American Nurses Association (2025) Code of Ethics, which affirms that "the nurse practices with compassion and respect for the inherent dignity, worth, and unique attributes of every person" (Provision 1, p. 1). Clearly, this applies to our neighbors, others in our town, and even those who live many miles from us and differ from us in every way. But is that enough? Is it enough to sincerely respect the rights and values of others?

The third provision of the Code states that the nurse "establishes a trusting relationship and advocates for the rights, health, and safety of recipient(s) of nursing care" (Provision 3, p. 8)

Provision 9 calls on nurses and professional organizations to "work to enact and resource practices, policies, and legislation to promote social justice, eliminate health inequities, and facilitate human flourishing" (Provision 9, p. 37). Organizations whose practices contribute to fear, family separation, or barriers to accessing health and safety—such as U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)—are not aligned with these ethical commitments.

Being a professional means, we indeed "profess" - that is, we promise to uphold the values and commitments of the profession for which we have entered. But I say to myself, ...as just one person, how can I possibly affect or alter these disturbing national cultural trends and behaviors? It is no easy task, but upholding our professional values means naming when systems or institutions conflict with the ethical standards we are sworn to uphold. There are many, many ways that each of us, as one nurse and

one citizen, can be part of course correction. We can contribute to causes, we can write letters to senators and representatives, we can attend rallies and peaceful protests against practices that are wrong, we can take the time to learn about what congressional candidates stand for, and, perhaps most importantly, we can be knowledgeable voters.

As we celebrate the birthday and life of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., let us each recommit ourselves to being the light this world needs. As he said, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that." (King, 1963). Be the light. ■

References:

- American Nurses Association. (2025). *Code of ethics for nurses with interpretive statements*. Author.
- King, M. L., Jr. (1963). *Strength to love*. Harper & Row.