

# All Hands on Deck!

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**Today is a challenging** time for nursing leaders. The Canadian healthcare landscape is complex with shifting priorities related to diverse and aging patient populations, policy and fiscal restraints and declining health human resources. The importance of exploring these issues through multiple lenses is important for Canadian executive nurses as we take the lead necessary to change the conversation and transform the healthcare system. I strongly believe that nurses are the solution for a new and revitalized health system.

The following is a reflection of my thoughts, experience and journey as a nursing leader that I share with you as the new president of ACEN. Donner and Wheeler's paper, "Twenty Years of donnerwheeler: What We've Learned," has provided an excellent framework for me to speak about what I, too, have learned over the years. While the journey to assuming a leadership position such as this is often stressful, the transition to a new role presents an opportunity to contemplate the past, consider the present and dream about the future. My own journey as a nurse has provided me with some wonderful opportunities to be exposed to health and healthcare in many ways. As I worked across Canada and in the United States, I learned about the best of each system and had the pleasure of experiencing the unique aspects of nursing in a variety of settings including acute care, long-term care, public health and home care. The career opportunities, incredible mentorship and the chance to learn from "little mistakes" gave me a solid foundation for my roles as staff nurse, manager and, now, a senior leader. Today, my focus is on home healthcare, where we are pioneering new frontiers, advancing clinical excellence and generating new knowledge for the system, all while creating an improved client experience. I feel very fortunate to bring these experiences with me as the new president of ACEN.

## **Dream Big**

Like Donner and Wheeler, taking on a senior leadership role was never my explicit plan. A point they make in their paper that particularly resonates with me is their discovery that many professional development programs have focused on helping nurses learn what they need to *do*, versus helping nurses *be* who they want to be. Donner and Wheeler say it so well:

Dreams sustain us and keep us moving forward. Over the span of your career, you will have dreams and hopes that at times may feel unachievable. Don't give up. Timing is critical; you have to keep connected to your network and continuously scan the environment until your time and opportunity come up.

This is my philosophy, too, and I imagine the belief of many nurse executives today. As leaders, we need to focus not just on getting the work done, but on helping nurses identify their aspirations and provide the supports and coaching required to realize their dreams. Yet, opening the door to new opportunities for ourselves and others is sometimes difficult; it requires the knowledge, skill and courage to be able to see possibilities “outside the box” and being brave enough to take a leap of faith even if there is a chance of failure. Through my journey I have learned more about myself and what is possible by opening new doors, and figuring out how to fail quickly and smartly.

## **Follow That Star!**

As president of ACEN, I will help move our shared vision forward through initiatives that will further our influence; participate in setting the directions for health-care policy and dialogue in Canada; contribute to the alignment and advancement of the national nursing practice, education, research and leadership agendas; develop strong strategic coalitions and partnerships with other healthcare leadership groups; support the development of current and emerging executive nurse leaders in Canada; and provide a forum to discuss and share strategies related to the key areas of nursing practice. To do this, I require your input, feedback and engagement as we move forward collectively to ensure that we keep this vision alive and are achieving success for our clients, colleagues and healthcare system.

## **Share the Wealth**

Donner and Wheeler point out that communication and building relationships is one of the most important aspects of leadership, and I couldn't agree more. Conversations should be inclusive: having the right people at the table and a diverse range of perspectives helps to advance new thinking and stronger solutions. Nurses involved in clinical practice, education, research, policy and leadership all bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to the table; the same goes for

nursing students, senior leaders and clients. All help to determine where we need to go, what we need to get there and how services need to be adapted to reflect our wishes. Of course, communication also needs to happen within the ACEN community. In my new role as president, I want to hear the voices of leaders across the country to help move the healthcare system in a new direction. As Donner and Wheeler point out, we need to share the wealth. It is not about the collecting of knowledge and expertise; it's really about the ability to share and provide our wisdom and mentorship to others to benefit not only ourselves, but also the profession and the larger healthcare system. So leaders, please come share with me. It is through discussions and sharing of our mutual vision for nursing that we are able to come up with needed solutions, continue to grow and provide better leadership in Canada and beyond. To truly transform the system, we need all hands on deck!

### **We Need a New Energy**

Finally, I want to make a plea to you: We need to change the conversation and be courageous and bold in creating solutions for a new tomorrow. I truly believe that nurses are the answer to transforming the system. But we need to encourage and facilitate new dialogue, be creative and innovative, and share and collaborate in order to create the wisdom required to be a nursing leader for today – and, most importantly, for tomorrow. Let's also create a collective energy, effervescence and new-found optimism for what can be! Watch as this little girl in the commercial shares her optimism with us: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-kKswLd65Ws>. She concludes that she can do anything. I believe we can, too!