ROLE OF NURSES IN AFTERMATH OF SUPERSTORM TAKES CENTER STAGE AT PROFESSIONAL CONFERENCE

No group was more prepared to handle the emergency situations caused by Hurricane Sandy than members of the Federation of Nurses/UFT — a fact that echoed loud and clear during its 33rd annual Professional Issues Conference at the Westin New York Grand Central on Nov. 16 and 17.

“It’s in a time of crisis that you have to use triage; that you have to use that knowledge you’ve gained,” said Anne Goldman, the Federation’s special representative. “And you came through.”

Goldman called colleagues “heroes who then went home to the same devastation as everyone else,” even as she excoriated “the people at the top of the pyramid who didn’t know what to do.”

UFT President Michael Mulgrew also praised Federation of Nurses members. “The work you did as a chapter and still are doing is what held a lot of places together,” Mulgrew said. (See p. 4 for stories of what some nurses did.)

He lauded the nurses for “working 16-hour shifts caring for physically and mentally ill patients even as the city failed to deploy the right people. It was the union and not the city,” he added, “that had hundreds of volunteers running up and down New York City Housing Authority buildings asking what people needed.”

The nurses also came through at the conference, packing the house with 400 attendees despite still being busy with hurricane-related commitments.

Goldman said the nurses’ rational approach to dealing with the tragedy was key to the good they were able to do.

“We can offer, as a union, a powerful and common-sense approach,” Goldman said, adding that efforts would fail without input from the people who actually do the work.

Mulgrew, meanwhile, noted that, “in the middle of all this, we had an election.”

UFT Director of Legislation and Political Action Paul Egan reviewed the many Election Day successes the union played a large part in delivering and reasoned that “it’s not about the money you have, but the people you have.”

Andy Pallotta, executive vice president of New York State United

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Nurses Need Wellness, too
(See stories on pp. 6-8)
I would like to take this opportunity to wish each of you a happy and healthy New Year.

As the year unfolds, I want to express my thanks and admiration to you for your professionalism and dignity in dealing with the challenges caused by Hurricane Sandy. During the crisis you provided each person with care, compassion and comfort despite grueling hours and deteriorating working conditions. Demonstrating a focused commitment to each patient, you were never distracted by the multifaceted challenges you faced, including concern for your own families and home. Without seeking recognition, so many of you joined President Michael Mulgrew and myself in the streets, in the homes of those affected by the Hurricane, and in doing your jobs under chaotic conditions. Our union and countless volunteers have also been so generous in dedicating their own time and many resources to offer the necessary help to so many, including our own union nurses. Our efforts made a difference that mattered to the victims of the storm.

Thanking you is simply not adequate to express recognition for your selfless efforts despite your own needs. You are truly incredible people who make a difference every day. The strength and humility of our union, epitomized by President Mulgrew, sets the standard for a true commitment to our community. It's a commitment without concern for formal recognition, photo opportunity or applause.

The ongoing challenges impact on all of us, whether we work in patients’ homes, in storm-crippled hospital wards or in emergency rooms overcrowded with flu patients. You have again demonstrated a relentless commitment to overcoming all these challenges and offering excellent patient care to each person you serve.

The ongoing challenges impact on all of us, whether we work in patients’ homes, in storm-crippled hospital wards or in emergency rooms overcrowded with flu patients. You have again demonstrated a relentless commitment to overcoming all these challenges and offering excellent patient care to each person you serve.

True patient care advocacy, utilizing all aspects of our health care system to treat people, is our goal as union members.

It’s our collective voice that is the countervailing force to a health-care system driven by short-cut schemes peddled as making patient care more “efficient.” People cannot be defined by bureaucratic rules or time frames. Our note as registered professional nurses is to tailor care to the individual patient. The person’s gender, age, education, culture are all a part of the patient care equation. Management that approach people as if they were identical widgets on an assembly line without individual identities are doing a major disservice to the people we serve, just as managers who do not understand the appropriate methodology for staffing units are damaging our ability to provide excellent patient care.

Patients’, who are not given appropriate support and education related to their health care needs, are not receiving appropriate care.

Patient care, education and advocacy are the fundamentals that drive us to create meaningful collective bargaining contracts providing clear support for the essential concepts necessary to recruit and retain a motivated, knowledge workforce.

Please join us at our meeting, political hearings and events that develop meaningful roles for us as professional registered nurses.

— Anne Goldman
above: RNs applaud bravura performance by the venerable New York City Labor Chorus.

left: Viewing a health wellness chart are Monica Dean (left), school nurse at Louis Armstrong Middle School and Mauva Campbell, RN at Lutheran Medical Center.

Professional Issues Conference continued from page 1

Teachers, the Federation’s statewide affiliate, said that those election victories will enable the union to push for increased funding for education and health care, including legislation governing safe patient handling.

The nurses also heard from American Federation of Teachers Healthcare Director Mary MacDonald, who noted in a presentation on “The Crisis in Health Care” that — despite having the world’s highest health care costs and with hospital, physician and drug costs eating up more than 60 cents of every health care dollar — the United States leads the world in unnecessary patient deaths. (See page 5).

Afterward, the nurses attended job-related workshops. In a session on elder abuse, UFT Retiree Social Services Director Sasha Greene reminded nurses that older individuals can be victims of physical assaults, mental cruelty and theft by family members, and that, unlike abuse of children, reporting of elder abuse is not mandatory.

“Report it and offer help to victims,” Greene urged. “You are out there. You know the situation. Tell your colleagues. Most important, give the victims a way out.”
UFT NURSES TELL OF WEATHERING THE STORM

Despite the fury of Superstorm Sandy, Federation nurses did their jobs and volunteered in the recovery. Visiting nurses even headed into the storm-strewn streets to reach patients in dire need.

They walked, stood in long lines for buses, climbed stairs in the dark, called nervous patients and brought medicine, flashlights and blankets. Much of lower Manhattan lost power; houses toppled on Staten Island; homes flooded or burned in Queens; subways flooded and service was interrupted for days.

“This was the worst devastation I’ve ever seen,” said the Federation’s Cynthia McDaniels, a visiting nurse from Jewish Home and Hospital Home Care and the agency’s union chapter leader.

“It’s mind-boggling. You couldn’t believe it’s New York,” said Anne Goldman, Federation special representative to the UFT.

“Some homes and buildings were ice cold; some neighborhoods you couldn’t drive in; but our visiting nurses went forward and did their work. They were there to offer support, even though many of them were victims of disaster themselves.”

McDaniels tried desperately to get to the home of a dying patient. Lines for the bus were a block and half long and people were “like cattle... knocking you over,” she said. She tried to find a cab, but none came. Subways were flooded. So she headed back to the bus line.

“I was able to get the bus, but it took me three hours to get from the office to the patient’s house,” she said. The trip usually takes 30 minutes. Without working stoplights, the bus driver stopped at every intersection. By the time McDaniels arrived, her patient had died.

She comforted the family and helped them make plans. “There’s life and death and in between we’re just making a difference,” McDaniels said.

Mary Ann Schroder, a Visiting Nurse Service of New York RN, was one of the thousands of Staten Islanders told to evacuate from their sections of the borough. She was contacting patients and packing in haste at the same time.

The next day, she contacted patients until her computer battery died. It was two days before she was able to visit them. Meanwhile, her own house was ruined — the basement and first floor were flooded.

“We’re all in the big mess here,” she said. Twelve days after the storm, her neighborhood still had no power. Homes were toppled. Debris had collected in every street. Her home was creeping with mold.

Other nurses working in facilities told similar stories.

Staten Island University Hospital RN Denice Caroselli described the huge influx of oxygen-dependent patients arriving after power fell on the island and recalled how the hospital’s back-up generator gave out after three days.

Lutheran Medical Center’s Joan Carrig said that her own home in Breezy Point was flooded. “It’s uninhabitable now,” she told Vital Signs in November, “and I’m living with my cousins in Staten Island.”

Lutheran’s Andrei Orlov was out of town on a long-planned vacation when the storm hit, and he returned to the Tottenville section of Staten Island to find his home damaged by sewer water that flooded the finished basement.

He also found his teenage son, who remained home, covered in mud — but from helping neighbors.

“My son rising to the situation was the silver lining,” Orlov said. “I was proud that we raised such a wonderful human being.”
Those high costs make health care in the United States frequently inaccessible, yet understaffing and poor management make the care we can deliver too often shoddy and in some cases dangerous. Bullying of staff is rife, and caseloads are chronically too high.

Nationwide, nurses routinely report operating room equipment that is potentially hazardous and say that nothing is done about it. With bullying and intimidation common, medical peer review committees still do little, often because staff fear retaliation from reporting incidents. Intimidating and disruptive behaviors can foster medical errors, too.

It doesn’t have to be this way, Mary MacDonald, director of health care for the American Federation of Teachers, our union’s national affiliate, told attendees at the Federation of Nurses/UFT Professional Issues Conference on November 17 that reforms are not only needed but easily implementable.

Some are already in the works.

Chief of these is the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, often called Obamacare. The legislation enacts reforms that provide affordable health insurance to 44 million uninsured Americans while reducing the growth in health care spending. It will deal with many problems when it is fully implemented next year by creating a system in which primary care doctors are paid for coordinating care. The plan includes improved monitoring of a patient’s vital signs after surgery, post-operative visits by the transplant surgeon, and—particularly important for nurses and patients—reducing the number of patients assigned to each registered nurse from six or seven to four.

More needs to be done, McDonald said, and it’s in nurses own hands to get it done.

McDonald urged lobbying state legislatures to enact avenues for legal redress, while holding employers accountable for not managing disruptive and bullying behavior by administrators. The state also needs to better allow for restoration of lost wages and benefits and provide whistleblower protection for those exposing shoddy practices and abusive administrators.

Collecting data through questionnaires to colleagues on how well care is provided is critical, too. “Would you be a patient in your unit?” McDonald said, is a good question to start with.

Other suggestions included:

- Seeing that contracts provide whistleblower protection.
- Participating in developing codes of conduct and training in such conduct.
- Making patient-safety information publicly available.
- Encouraging providers to come together in large groups and begin acting as insurers.
- Creating incentives for improving quality by penalizing hospitals with high rates of HAIs, readmissions within 30 days, low scores on physical therapy outcomes and satisfaction.

“And, as always, keep building a stronger union and a stronger voice for nurses,” she said.
MAKE 2013 OUR ‘WELLNESS YEAR.’

NURSES serve patients best both mentally and physically when we’re healthy ourselves, yet we’re often lax about our own health. There are numerous proactive ways to stay healthy and ward off being sick, from regular checkups and massages to joining a gym or weight-loss program and preparing and eating a wide variety of nutritious and tasty foods.

The Federation of Nurses/UFT takes wellness for nurses seriously. So seriously that we’ve even gotten a $150,00 grant from Empire Blue Cross-Blue shield to develop a wellness program that includes blood pressure exams, screening of HDL, LDL and glucose levels as well as body mass index number testing. We’re also sponsoring cooking classes run by professional chefs.

Another way the grant aided us in promoting wellness was in allowing the union to promote writing and drawing contests for RNs and LPNs who are members of the Federation of Nurses/UFT Health Care Chapter Benefit Fund. In one, nurses were encouraged to write an essay on why “wellness” is a goal worth pursuing. Three winners, Susan Barba, an RN at Staten Island University Hospital, Glenda Pollard of the Visiting Nurse Service of New York and RN Joan Rowe of Lutheran Medical Center were chosen and awarded $500 each. In another, members were asked to opine on the benefits of message therapy and its effects on wellness. The massage contest winner, Frances Dooley, a nurse practitioner at Choice MLTC in Queens, won a free monthly message for a year. In a third contest, RNs were tasked with designing a poster that graphically detailed ways to achieve and maintain that state of health wellness. VNS’s Tanya Luetsing garnered first prize and $500 (see poster below).

Congratulations to all the winners! There are numerous proactive ways to stay healthy and ward off being sick, so we must start thinking selfishly. We must first take care of ourselves before we can take care of others; we must stop putting ourselves last and “put the oxygen mask on ourselves first.”

Wellness programs are linked to greater productivity, less absenteeism and a reduction in long-term health care costs. Healthy habits among employees can prevent or lower the risk of serious health conditions later and also help those with existing health conditions manage them.

Promoting health and wellness should be a partnership between both employer and employees in order to be successful, and the good news is that it doesn’t have to be an expensive comprehensive program. There are small steps each can take to promote wellness.

Employers should promote preventive care and employees should take advantage of these services. Encouraging and funding vaccinations for employees has one of the clearest return on investment. When employees avoid the flu, they avoid missing out on days, if not weeks, of work.

Encourage exercise and leisure time. Can’t make structural changes to the facility? Implement and promote a lunch-hour walking club, consider offering secure bike parking for commuters or provide showering facilities for employees who wish to work out at lunchtime and offer incentives for employees who participate. Encourage all employees to use the stairs. This can be done by initiating a stairs climbing challenge in which employees use the stairs rather than taking the elevators. Offer discounts or partially subsidize memberships to local gyms or exercise clubs.

Another big area to focus on is mental health promotion. Unmanaged stress has been linked to heart disease, high blood pressure and sleep trouble. In the workplace, it can lead to inefficiency, job dissatisfaction and absence from work for related health conditions.

Emphasis must be placed on education to keep employees in the know. This could be in the form of a brown bag luncheon or break-time seminar to help employees learn more about healthy habits. Recruit speakers to lead the sessions on cooking healthy meals, and managing stress, and offer incentives for employees who attend. If space permits, consider bringing in yoga, tai chi or aerobics instructors for lunchtime classes. Try sponsoring a monthly massage for employees over lunch or throughout a work day. The Intranet could be utilized to post accurate health and wellness information.

As working registered professional nurses, it is our responsibility to start thinking selfishly. We must first take care of ourselves before we can take care of others; we must stop putting ourselves last and “put the oxygen mask on ourselves first.”

I think the first step should be to start the day with breakfast. Studies show that eating breakfast can raise metabolism by as much as 10 percent, thus providing the energy needed to perform at our best in an often demanding workday. Then progress to packing your lunch and healthy snacks.

Wellness programs save lives and money. That’s the bottom line.
THE THERAPEUTIC EFFECTS OF MASSAGE

By Frances Dooley, nurse practitioner / Choice MLTC Queens

Human touch is one of life’s basic needs. Research shows that babies who are fondled and touched regularly from birth thrive better than those who are not. When we bruise ourselves or get hit with a ball or other object, what is the first thing we do? We rub it. It is an innate reflex. Why do we do it? Because it makes us feel better.

Therapeutic massage has been studied and shown to produce healing results, just like when we rub the foot we just banged into the table. Why does the rubbing make it feel better? The answer to this question lies in the numerous effects and benefits of therapeutic massage.

Therapeutic massage is a skilled form of “rubbing” that elicits a relaxation response from the body. The skilled therapist is able to stimulate tissue through various types of movements such as effleurage, petrissage, friction, tapotement and stretching. Through these movements the therapist encourages healing by increasing the blood flow through injured areas. This action helps to remove waste products, in the form of lactic acid and toxic debris, out of the cells while improving the flow of oxygen and nourishment into the cells. The rhythmic action of massage moves lymphatic fluid out of the tissue of patients who, for one reason or another, do not have adequate muscle contraction to do this on their own. This action also improves venous blood return in inactive patients.

Therapeutic massage has been shown to reduce stress by decreasing cortisol levels and reducing muscle tension, thus enhancing the immune system. It helps to stretch and loosen muscle and connective tissue, which improves joint flexibility. It improves range of motion, muscular imbalances and energy levels. It speeds the recovery from exercise and training injuries. It relieves trigger points, which can radiate pain to various parts of the body. Therapeutic massage is the antidote to pain.

In addition, therapeutic massage has been shown to help in the treatment of depression. The action of massage triggers the release of the “feel good endorphins” serotonin. The calming action of touch, with the release of these endorphins, helps to relieve anxiety while producing a sedative effect on the nervous system.

These actions have been shown to reduce headaches, enhance sleep quality and, in some cases, ease the dependence on medication.

Therapeutic massage has implications in a wide range of nursing areas. The geriatric patient, or any bedridden patient, can benefit from massage’s ability to prevent muscle atrophy from forced inactivity due to illness, injury or age. The oncology patient can benefit from massage’s relaxation effect during chemo treatments. In the OB/GYN area, the pregnant mother can also benefit from the relaxation response afforded through massage. The orthopedic area provides an endless number of situations where therapeutic massage would be beneficial in promoting healing sports injuries, surgical procedures, etc. The possibilities are limitless.

As you can see, the beauty of the benefits of therapeutic massage is that they can help a wide range of our patients by adding to their state of wellness. Wellness is a state of optimal health and wellbeing. Each person has a responsibility to provide for such health essentials as good nutrition, proper weight control, exercise and controlling risk factors such as smoking, alcohol and drug abuse. These things all play a role in wellness. However, sometimes our patients need a little extra help in their healing process. Therapeutic massage can be that little extra that can get the patient over the hump.

Our responsibility as nursing professionals is to care for the patient. Sometimes that means just holding a patient’s hand. This element of touch, which is the essence of therapeutic massage, can complete the human connection and add to the comforting that so many of our patients desire and need.

The hospice/palliative patient can benefit from this approach in numerous ways, too. Therapeutic massage can be the tool that completes the patient’s wellness plan.

One more important thing to remember is that the practitioner can benefit from therapeutic massage as much as the patient. Our work is rewarding but stressful at times. Let the benefits of therapeutic massage help you as well.
WELLNESS: MAKING SENSE OF THE INFORMATION… AND SOME SUGGESTIONS  By Glenda Pollard, RN, Visiting Nurse Service of NY

Red rice yeast ? 2 Badly beets ?  
Ester-c ?/Omega3’s? Statin doses?/Yoga poses?  
“Don’t push me ’cause i’m close to the edge...”  
I’m trying to get health instead..(Huh-huh-huh-huh-huh)

Everywhere I turn these days it seems as though there is a Lil’ Bow Wow thought or miraculous aid in helping us to achieve optimal health and wellness. One mention of a natural product on Dr. Oz or The Doctors will send hordes of pilgrims to the local Vitamin Shoppe or GNC in search of that silver bullet that promises to assist us in achieving “health and wellness.”

We are a nation that, while seemingly obsessed with attaining health, is paradoxically at the forefront of per capita prevalence of lifestyle illnesses such as adult onset diabetes, hypertension, cardiac diseases and some cancers.

This has to leave us pondering what to do with the avalanche of medical information (sometimes contradictory) and the popular culture remedies advanced by the media. How to make sense of it all!

Surely we have to begin at the beginning and “KNOW OUR NUMBERS.” In my case they are pretty dismal - but say you emerge from the wellness center clutching a paper slip that shows pretty good numbers: BP 114/56; BMI 21.8%; HDL62; LDL 55. EUREKA! “I am WELL.” But what is wellness anyway?

A quick check on Wikipedia shows that the Wisconsin based National Wellness Institute defines wellness as “an active process of becoming aware of and making choices toward a more successful existence.” In nursing school I learned that wellness was more than the absence of disease. It was a concept that embraced the balance of body, mind and spirit in achieving our highest health potential. With these definitions in mind, here are my suggestions for achieving optimal health and wellness:

1. Challenge your mind daily
   • Learn a new skill.
   • Think out of the box. Approach an old problem from a different perspective. Try a new solution

2. Challenge your body daily
   • Change up the routine. Set new goals in the gym.
   • BREATHE SLOW DEEP BREATHS

3. Soothe your spirit daily
   • Make yourself a priority. Give care to the caregiver—you.
   • Understand that stress will always be there. 
   • TRANSCEND stress by engaging in activities that elevate your mood (Music, Dance, Nature, Friends, Family, Church, etc.)
   • Remain centered. Remember the first two lines of the Kipling poem,
     “If you can keep your head when all about you Are losing theirs and blaming it on you ….”

WORKING NURSES AND A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE  
By Susan Barba, RN, Staten Island University Hospital

All of us have busy lives, and there never seems to be enough time. We as nurses are professional caregivers in our personal lives. This makes our schedules particularly rigorous. We are responsible for not only our own but the schedules of our partners, children, parents and sometimes even our friends. There are work, school, medical appointments, social events, sports and after-school activities, shopping, drop offs, pick-ups—the list is endless!

How can we balance our corner of the world and still stay healthy? I think the secrets are good planning and motivation. The motivation is the desire to want to feel and look and be better. Planning is how we achieve it. We plan every other thing we do, so why not meals, relaxation and our exercise, too?

Let’s start with meals. Plan your grocery shopping; use a list. It’s just as easy to throw a bag of baby carrots in your cart as it is a bag of chips. Make extra at dinner and prepare your lunch for the next day, using that before you put it on the table, and there are no leftovers. That helps with portion control as well. So many times we nurses rush through our breaks and grab something from the cafeteria that is quick, but too caloric, sugary and full of fat. Adding insult to injury is that you are hungry again in two hours.

Exercise is another activity you must plan. Make the time in your day. Delegate some of those tasks and errands to other people in your household, hire a babysitter or swap childcare with a friend. Free up some time for you.

For me, exercise is part of my relaxation. It takes the edge off a stressful day. If you need time to read, paint, paint, meditate, watch TV or do whatever it is you do to relax, again, plan it—just for you.

I do know you have heard this all before. I do know that sometimes we are just too exhausted to do anything that I have mentioned here, and you will end up having a frozen pizza for dinner or fall asleep in the middle of your medication. There is nothing harder than being too tired to go for a run and forcing yourself. But there is nothing better than the feeling you get when you are done.

Prioritize YOU. Respect YOU. I think the rest will fall into place. You do deserve to be healthy.