

# Learning Together: Preparing for the Future

Address to the World Operating Room Conference - X

By Dr. Joan Donald, RN

Looking down the road to the future of Perioperative Nursing, I find it hard to even expect what the year 2017 will look like. I can only be guided by the great advances in the past 20 years. The world of surgery and perioperative nursing has already been transformed into something quite different from what it was 20 years ago. At the rapid pace that we are heading into the next millennium, we can only expect that things will change even faster. So how do we prepare for that? What do we need in order to be ready for the next 20 years?

I will share some of the things that I believe in and that I have learned in the past few years. Some of these lessons I have learned from colleagues from around the world. I am grateful for the opportunities that I have had for learning, and for this opportunity to share my thoughts and ideas with you. I returned to school three years ago to pursue doctoral studies which had been a lifelong dream of mine. My husband was retired by this time and kindly consented to join me in my pursuit of knowledge. I come from a small community on the east coast of Canada - small by Toronto standards, so the big city seemed quite overwhelming at first. I learned a great deal at the university, but some of the greatest lessons were learned from life itself and nursing colleagues. Some of the things I learned were:

- You are never too old to learn. Two people can live in a one bedroom apartment and still be speaking to each other at the end of the week.
- You meet wonderful people who become good friends, even in the big city.
- You must ruin your eyes with too much reading because I now have to wear glasses.
- Becoming a student again is rejuvenating - there were times when I'd get on an elevator, look around the crowd and think - they're younger than my chil-

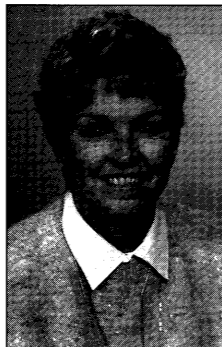
dren - and I'm "one of the crowd"

One of my greatest joys was receiving my student card. This made it official - I really was one of them. I would get a great chuckle when my husband would walk up to a box office to buy tickets for the theater and ask for one student and one senior. I would tease him about taking a student out on dates ... until one day we were travelling by train to a conference in Montreal. The conductor asked for our tickets - one a student, the other a senior. He looked at the tickets, looked at my husband, then at me, then back at the tickets and again at the both of us and asked "Which one is the student?"

## Learning Together

As with any true student, in preparing for this talk, I began with defining the key words of the theme for this conference. **Celebrate** - To observe with ceremonies of respect, rejoicing, or festivity. **Global** - Worldwide or comprehensive. **Partnership** - One who is associated with another in a shared activity. There

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have been many examples of shared activity and comprehensive rejoicing this week. But how do we sustain this enthusiasm and take control of our future? To start with, I believe there are fundamental skills that we will all require in order to meet the challenges of the next 20 years. I will identify four major skills. You may have your own list which is right for you, your country, and the times in which you live. Pursue your own goals, but do consider these. I call them the four "C's".

## #1 - Computer Skills

Has any other medium of communication opened up our horizons and enlarged our boundaries as dramatically as computers? I think not. It is not unusual today to be sending a message to a colleague in any one of the five continents. What a wonderful opportunity to network and share global information! Just as a matter of survival, can we bank or shop today without the benefit of computers? Hospitals record of all activities - patient care, finances, quality improvement - everything is done on computer. As Tim Porter-O'Grady said recently at AORN, "Not only have computers changed what we do, they have also changed who we are". Think about it - each one of us who has been forced into computer literacy is now different because of it. We think differently, we access information sources differently, and we accept change differently. As the saying goes "Change is mandatory, Growth is optional". Change will continue to bombard us throughout the next millennium. In order to grasp it and grow with it, you will need computer skills. This brings me to the second item on the list for, along with computer skills we will need communication skills.

## #2 - Communication Skills

In the future, communication skills will entail more than speaking and actively listening to each other. These are important aspects of communication but we need to do more. We need to be able to think on our feet and then we need to be able to present our ideas so that others understand and appreciate them. We need to be able to communicate to other disciplines and to the world that patient outcomes are different because we are there. If you ask yourself "How did I make a difference for that patient?" - can you answer that question? And can you answer it in a way that others know how you made a difference? Not an easy challenge but one that we must all accept and pursue with dedication and enthusiasm.

I am reminded of an example from our hospital that speaks to making a difference in patient outcomes. I noticed an elderly woman who was coming to have her eye surgery and who was walking to the OR with one of my perioperative nurses. They were arm in arm and chatting happily down the corridor as the nurse was preparing her for the surgical experience. I was struck by what a beautiful picture of caring this moment of friendly communication was and I later told the nurse. She looked rather surprised when I mentioned it, but smiled and I know she realized that she made a difference in that patient's life. We do it automatically. Communication is so important in our world. That is why we provide translation of documents and presentations. But we don't all have to speak the same language, in fact, we may not have to speak at all in order to be understood. Actions of caring speak much louder than any spoken word. I learned this once again during the past year.

One of my units provides two beds for outpatients to come in and receive blood transfusions. This is an outpatient surgical unit so it is staffed by operating room nurses. One of the patients who comes to us regularly for a transfusion is a frail Chinese lady who doesn't speak English. She is usually accompanied by a family member who provides translation services. One day she arrived, the transfusion was started, and for a period of time the family member had to leave. During that time it became evident that this lady was slipping down further and further in the bed. She became anxious and worried which concerned the family members of the other patient in the room. They called for the nurse who came and assessed the situation. The nurse knew she could not talk with this patient. As she gently lifted her up and secured her once again in the proper position, she leaned over and kissed her on the forehead. The grateful Chinese lady immediately relaxed and smiled. They communicated - far better than words ever will.

Caring is communication. As Tim Porter-O'Grady says, "Change is the music of the universe, we provide the lyrics". As change surrounds us, we need to provide lyrics that communicate caring and expertise in perioperative nursing. And we must be able to communicate the value of our role in patient care to others!

## #3 - Cooperation

The third "C" stands for Cooperation - being a Cooperative Team Player. One of the greatest skills you can bring to perioperative nursing is the ability to get along with people. People of all races, religions,

colors, and ideologies. Teams are made up of individuals - you and I. We each bring to the team our own unique skills, talents, and points of view. The International Planning Committee is a model of global teamwork with representation from various countries who come together to plan conferences such as this. Each members' contribution is unique and valued. As increased emphasis is placed on the importance of multidisciplinary teams in health care, we need to learn to work with others. To share our ideas while being open to the concerns and views of others. On the global scene, we must continue to respect others who may be different from ourselves. We must invite people from around the globe to join in and make them feel welcomed. Canada recently sent a delegation to South East Asia in an effort to promote Canada as a trading partner. The delegation was known as "Team Canada". It struck me that we could take an example from this and develop something I might label "Team World" - this would be representative of our world of perioperative nursing. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could get a team together that would be representative of many countries whose mandate would be to dialogue on global issues. To actually make decisions and recommendations with a truly global perspective. This could be done by computer and various tasks groups could be brought together in global problem-solving. A true example of partnering for all the world to see!

#### **4 - A Commitment to Life-Long Learning**

There is likely nothing more important for preparing for the future than a commitment to lifelong learning. How else will you learn about the new technologies, computers, different ways to communicate, how to be a team player, and the million other things you need to know unless you are committed to learning? The trick is to keep on learning despite the constant change around us. Fullan and other scholars say that learning is linked to our own quality of life. If we have not learned to control our own lives, no amount of learning will make things better for others. We must achieve balance and harmony internally before we can learn and make a difference in others. Learning begins with self and you must take the initiative. Attending educational conferences such as this World Conference is one avenue. Hearing what our colleagues are facing and concerned about helps to put things in perspective. Paying attention to the signposts along the road to the future and to what is happening all around us - these are the keys to being

prepared. Being prepared will help us ride the roller coaster of change - change in our jobs, not only in technology but our changing roles and responsibilities. The fact that some nurses are losing their jobs confirms the importance of continual learning which becomes our safety net. When one door closes another opens and what you have learned will help turn disappointments into opportunities. Personal change is the most powerful route to system change. Organizations learn through individuals who learn. Without personal growth, organizations stagnate and die. Organizations and nations don't change - individuals do. The world is constantly changing and we had better pay attention. We learn from each other. It's all about connecting - connecting to people as people - Princess Diana and Mother Theresa taught us that well. Look at the people around you - those around you at work, your family, your professional relationships, and your social relationships outside of work. Learning prepares us for all aspects of our life. Make your connections work for you. They will help you achieve balance in work and play. Learning makes each and every one of us who we are. Again, I agree with Tim Porter-O'Grady who says that we should be known for who we are, not for what we do. I am increasingly convinced that you are employed for who you are, not for what you do. Any number of other people could do some of the things that you do - maybe not as well, mind you, but the fact remains that it is you in that position, not someone else. The knowledge that you have makes you stand out - you are special because of who you are and everything that you have learned throughout your lifetime contributes to who you are. Never stop learning.

#### **Learning Together!**

We have looked at the four "C's" or talents that I think you might need in preparation for the next 20 years - computer skills, communication skills, cooperation, and a commitment to life-long learning. Now we will look at the keys that will help us unlock the door to the future. How will we use these talents and skills to benefit our global partners and the patients in our care? As we think about the future, we have to consider the here and now and what we have that can help us in preparing for the future.

#### **Preparing for the future**

In his book entitled "Shared Values for a Troubled World" Kidder talks about worldshrink, technobulge, and consensus building. Worldshrink simply means that our world has become "smaller" - the ease of long

distance travel, computers and global communication means that every nation now has access to experts and information that is literally at our fingertips or an airplane trip away. Technobulge is a result of a shrinking world for as the world shrinks, technology expands. Technology related to genetic engineering or weather control is so awesome that it is both impressive and at the same time worrisome. Genetic engineering presents us with ethical dilemmas that are likely to become increasingly complex.

Consensus Building relates to the need for global problem solving. Can we hope to save our planet if we can't agree on how to save our rain forests? In this world that is shrinking, where technology is bulging, and at a time that consensus building is required - can we bring people from around the world into a true global partnership for problem solving? I believe it comes down to values. We need to identify our shared values. The question is "Is there a set of values that wise, ethical people around the world might agree on?" - A Global Code of Ethics? Just this week it was announced that a global code of ethics for business has been established. Is there a common core of values in our world of perioperative nursing? If you were asked to help create a global code of ethics for perioperative nursing, what would you put in it? If a committee that represented perioperative nurses from around the world were struck - or, as was discussed at the World International Forum on Wednesday, an International Federation - and their mandate was to develop a global code of ethics, what moral values would you bring to the table from your own culture and background?

Following interviews of people from around the world, Kidder identified eight moral values that should shape our future. They are:

- Love
- Truthfulness
- Fairness
- Freedom
- Unity
- Tolerance
- Responsibility
- Respect for Life

These eight moral values were identified and published in 1994 - what portion of them has been achieved? Do we see a world that reflects love, truthfulness, fairness, and freedom? Is there global unity, tolerance, responsibility, and respect for life? What role has each one of us played in helping to promote a set of values that will dissolve borders, transcend races, and be sensitive to cultural tradi-

tions? This is no easy task to be sure. However, if you believe, as I do, that values are the moral glue that binds us together as a profession, then I also believe that we have both the ethics and the will to establish a Global Code of Ethics for Perioperative Nursing.

How do we go about this? Where do we start? As with other things, we start with self. What values do you live by? Each and every one of us is a teacher of moral values. We do this whether we know it or not; whether we want to or not; whether we admit it or not - we do it by the examples we set, the choices we make, and the lives we live. What you think, what you say, what you do - all reflect what you value. We are setting the example for our children, for the people around us, and for the young OR nurses of the future. Each one of you is teaching the next generation of perioperative nurses and preparing them for what lies ahead. This is called leadership - and you didn't even apply for the position.

Just as we must accept responsibility for nurturing our children, we also must accept responsibility for nurturing our periop nurses of the future. Look at that young novice who is trying so hard beside you, and ask yourself, "What can I do to make her or his future better?" "How can I help that nurse become keener, more dedicated to perioperative nursing, and more self-assured?" What can I do to help?

A few weeks ago our teen choir at church sang a song which said that "If we can learn to give, we can live as one". As I reflected on these words in the days thereafter, I questioned whether or not these kids were on to something. Had they learned the answer to the age-old question of how to stop wars, how people can get along, how to end famine, and how to truly love our neighbor? The more I thought about it, the more convinced I was that, yes, they were on to something - something of value to the world. How often are wars fought because of an inability to give on an issue? How often are people starving because of an inability to give? And on and on questions continued in my head. Then I thought of our world of perioperative nursing. Can we as perioperative nurses around this globe live as one? I asked myself, "What do I have to give that might help?" What do we have to give to each other? And as the days and nights thereafter passed, the thoughts came flooding in - so many things that it was hard to narrow the list down. My list goes like this **1 - I can give of my prosperity**. Many areas of the world have so much and others have so little. To feed a hungry child for a week in one country can mean as little as a few extra cups of coffee for people in other lands. To help with relief work in

war torn areas of the world, areas devastated by natural disasters such as floods and earthquakes, may not be possible personally, but we can give in other ways of a personal nature such as donations of clothing, finances, and emotional support. We are all members of this global community and we must help each other.

### The global community of OR nurses

One of my early memories of World OR Conferences that touched my heart took place at the closing ceremonies. A nurse from an area that was ravaged by war came to the microphone. As was the custom at the time, she had no gift to present - instead she wanted to give thanks for the gift that she had received. This one week away from the broken bodies, the crying children, and the desperate parents was a gift that she would cherish for the rest of her life. She had been inspired by fellow OR nurses from around the world. She was going back with a renewed passion and devotion to her role as a perioperative nurse, mending broken bodies and praying for peace. Our heartfelt support went out to her as we renewed our pledge to remember our colleagues less fortunate than we around the world. Yes, we can give prosperity.

**2 - I can give my Knowledge and Expertise.** You have taken the time to invest in yourselves and I know you will continue to do so throughout your lifetime as you commit yourselves to life-long learning. Now it is up to you to share this knowledge and expertise with partners around the globe. Today is just a beginning, not an ending. Although our conference ends today, you will just be beginning to share what you know and the skills that you have acquired. Each thing that you can share or give to others will make their lives easier. You are familiar with the saying that "we don't need to reinvent the wheel". I like to say that "if we know how the wheel works, show others how to roll it". We have a responsibility to share our knowledge and skills. Remember my definitions, partnering is shared activity. We can give knowledge and expertise.

**3 - I can give Caring.** Perioperative nurses, in my opinion, possess a very special kind of caring. We are tough when we need to be, but we are also unique and superb at caring and giving. I am reminded of my staff educator who spent many hours outside of her regular working hours with a family whose only child had advanced cancer. She met the family as they brought their daughter to the OR for an amputation. They were distraught and anxious and my nurse educator went to

them following the surgery and provided information and support for as many days as they needed it. That is giving. I see nurses who give of their off time to work on staffing schedules or to improve the layout of supplies and equipment in the OR. Nurses may not think of these day-to-day things as giving or caring, but they are. Perhaps an even more dramatic example lies in this next story. It involved the nursing manager of the OR of a pediatric hospital in a large Canadian city. One day a youngster came to the OR for heart surgery. The child was terribly upset, crying, and turning bluer by the minute. The OR manager picked the terrified child up and cuddled her in her arms. The youngster settled down and clung to the nurse. There was a delay in starting the surgery so the nursing manager went back to her office where the child fell quietly to sleep on her lap. An hour passed while the nurse managed to do a few things as the child slept peacefully in her arms. When it was time to begin the operation, she carried the sleeping child to the OR where she continued to sleep into a peaceful induction and anaesthesia. The tragedy is that the child did not survive the operation. However, the glory of this story is that this little child spent the last hour of its life in the loving arms of an OR nurse. A nurse like you - she is one of you and she sits in this audience today. This is Caring - this is perioperative nursing - this is our gift to the world. Mother Theresa and Princess Diana would both be proud. We can give caring.

**4 - I can give Hope.** In a hurting world, the one thing that we can all give is hope - hope for an end to famine, to poverty, to ignorance, and to war. The dictionary says that hope is "a wish or desire accompanied by expectations of its fulfillment". Can we fail to hope without trying to make it happen? I think not. Each and every one of us has a responsibility to see that our wish or desire is accompanied by the expectation to make it happen. If we can learn to give, we can live as one. Celebrating global partnerships as we move toward the next 20 years challenges us all to learn, to share, and to hope. As we join hands around the globe, we all hope for a better future - or as Jeany Botsford, President of AORN says, a preferred future - one that we design for ourselves, not one that we inherit by default. We can do that! We can live our vision of perioperative nursing; we can teach our young nurses what that vision is, we can join hands around the world and develop a Global Code of Ethics for Perioperative Nursing. We can design our preferred future.

As I look out over the sea of faces here in this audience, I see representatives from different back-

grounds, different countries, and different cultures. But I believe you all share one thing in common - a commitment to life long learning - otherwise you would not be here. You came here to learn about emerging disease threats, new technologies, ethical concerns, and on the list goes. Increasingly you will learn how computers can assist you in your work and how they will allow you to communicate with colleagues around the globe. You will communicate with confidence and clarity and you will tell the world how we make a difference in the lives of our patients and that the outcome is better because we are there.

### Faith in The Future

I have talked about the four "C's. I want to add another "C", C for Courage. So many of you have demonstrated courage that has been above and beyond the call of duty. You have had the courage to submit papers, to display posters, to go to a microphone and speak, and to initiate conversations with people from other countries who may not speak your language. You have had the courage to articulate your views, to present in a language other than your mother tongue, and to share your experiences even though it meant reliving the pain and the sadness. For some, the very act of flying to another country is an example of enormous courage. This week you have given your gifts of courage to others.

With today's economic conditions, many hospitals no longer provide funding for staff members to attend conferences such as this. Many of you are here on your own initiative. Some have taken vacation and some have had to pay their own way. I think the message is very clear You are willing to give!

You are willing to give in order to learn together and to prepare for the future. You are willing to give that we may live as one. As you leave here today and return to your homes, your families, and your work place - take time to reflect on the week and on the future. The many nurses at this conference are testament to our faith in the future. But even more important, they are the pathway to the future. Think of the courage displayed this week by your colleagues from around the globe and take time to say "Thank you". Remember the gifts that you have been given that you now must share with others. Give of your prosperity, Give of your knowledge and expertise, Give of your caring, and Give hope - hope for a preferred future - one that you can help shape because you have been

here. One that you can help shape by preparing the perioperative nurses of the future, One that you will shape because you care and because you are the world of perioperative nursing. Last week as we listened to Elton John sing "Candle in the Wind" at the funeral of Princess Diana, we heard the stirring words:

*"Your candle's burned out long before  
your legend every will".*

Now as the lights go out on this the tenth World Conference of Operating Room Nurses, the legacy will live on in each and every one of you. I thank you for caring, and I thank you most of all for being the future world of perioperative nursing. Yes, YOU ARE THE FUTURE !! YOU ARE THE WORLD!! May you be richly blessed in all that you do.

### Reference

Kidder, R.M. (1994) Shared Values for a Troubled World. Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco.

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