Pennsylvania Nightingale Awards: A Celebration of Excellence!

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For more than two decades, the Pennsylvania Nightingale Awards Program has celebrated excellence, creates, supports and nurtures healthy work environments, provides scholarship assistance and ultimately recognizes outstanding nurses within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Far more than simply a venue to distribute awards, scholarships and professional recognition, the Nightingale Awards accomplishes much more. One accomplishment is contribution to healthy work environments. When individuals are nominated, become finalists or awardees, this gives their colleagues a stake in the outcome, making it an opportunity their colleagues to join in celebration. A second accomplishment is motivating a nominee/finalist or awardee for further strides in their own professional development. This can motivate pursuit of professional degrees, professional publication and mentoring others. A third accomplishment is nurturing and creating examples and role models for peers of the nominee/awardee. This accomplishment can provide others opportunity to see what is possible to achieve or aspire to as a nurse.

A fourth accomplishment is, through scholarship support, making it possible for individuals, through great personal challenges, to become a professional nurse or pursue advanced education. This is best expressed by example. A 2013 Nightingale scholarship recipient, Ms. Tosha Lee completed undergraduate nursing education despite significant personal challenges. Being a young single mother, she was profoundly affected by the prenatal and childbirth care she received from her nurses. This experience had such an impact on her it formed the core of her inspiration:
“To become a nurse and give back to the community. The care my nurses delivered had a powerful impact on not just my pregnancies and birth experiences but my entire future. I have a passion for helping all mothers be the best mothers they can be, but I take a particular interest in those mothers that are in the margins: the young and the poor. I want to continue this work, however, I would like to transition from the inpatient setting to the community. The role of Nurse Practitioner will best suit me, my goals for practice and have the most impact in the community.”

The Nightingale scholarship received by Ms. Lee not only supports her through an academic program but has a far wider impact in making a difference for the underserved community which will benefit from her caring, education, inspiration and experience.

A fifth accomplishment is helping a nursing staff celebrate achievements of one of their own. A recent Nightingale Awards Finalist, Ms. Anna Kirk initially felt overwhelmed when she found out about being an awards finalist. As she shared about that experience:

“I just felt overwhelmed, I was speechless, didn’t know what to say, I was very honored and humbled. When the staff heard about it, everyone was so excited and celebrated with me. One more thing I was happy about as time went on was that there was more and more interest in doing more Nightingale nominations to have more staff see what they can aspire to.

In this respect, participation in the Nightingale Awards contributed to the unit’s work environment, being something positive for peers to focus on and celebrate.

Focusing on and celebrating initiative is something that the Nightingale Awards does extraordinarily well. Initiative, striving, making an effort and being positive and supportive rather than negative and critical is what the Nightingale Awards supports. What
bears mention now is that there can be no finalists or awardees without those that support, mentor, nurture, encourage and above all recognize excellence. Doing an award nomination is a responsibility and a way to give back to nursing and even though challenging at times, it is an example of the best of which the nursing profession is capable. It helps exemplify, it helps celebrate achievement and initiative and making a difference, some of the best that nursing is capable of, rather than timidity, criticism and disparagement. This quote from President Theodore Roosevelt fits very well.

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It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.

Theodore Roosevelt; Paris, France, April 23rd, 1910.

Our Past-President’s words also illustrate both ends of the continuum of which nursing is capable. The Nightingale Awards celebrates achievement, initiative and makes a difference through identifying award and scholarship recipients. Participation makes a difference in real-time and in real lives.