

Nurses at the Table of Innovation

The Nursing Now USA South Florida Lecture Series delivers new visions for patients and the future of the profession.

By Robin Shear and Yolanda Mancilla

Barbara Stilwell doesn't want you to think of Florence Nightingale as she's often portrayed in picture books, a nice lady in a bonnet carrying a lamp as she tends to wounded soldiers. "Florence Nightingale actually was not a very nice woman. She was a very difficult woman," explained Stilwell. "She really engaged in data, dialogue, and decision-making. She took these data to the Houses of Parliament and made a nuisance of herself until somebody took notice."

"Nurses must be at the table of innovation—figuring out how emerging technologies are going to work for patients."

Something of a modern-day British nursing legend herself, Stilwell, the executive director of the Nursing Now global campaign, sees less lamp and more torch in nursing's future. "What we want is a difficult leader [like Nightingale], somebody who's going to be memorable and influential," she

said during her lecture at the School of Nursing and Health Studies this past March, which was livestreamed due to coronavirus.

Stilwell, who helped establish the UK's first nurse practitioner training program, and has held high-level positions with the World Health Organization and IntraHealth International, joined Nursing Now in 2018. She said Nursing Now's three-year campaign, aimed at improving health by raising the profile and status of nurses and midwives, now has over 600 regional, national, and local groups connected across 117 countries with the potential to inspire "a huge social movement" and cause "fractures in the status quo."

"We're trying to get nurses much more embedded and involved in policy," said Stilwell. "They bring scientific knowledge, which they apply in a highly skilled way using high-level communication and relationship skills."

Pointing to the current pandemic, she added, "Nurses have a lot to say about the coronavirus and the crisis because a lot of how you manage it is about information. It's about hygiene. It's about distancing. All the things nurses actually know quite a lot about and usually can translate for the public to



Patricia Flatley Brennan

understand," she said. "And yet we are not included; we are not integral to much of this decision-making."

The remedy? "Confident leadership," she concluded, advising nurses to use data from their work to speak out and press for change. "If nurses can get together and say, 'this is what we need; this is what we want,' they're more likely to be successful than by themselves. There should be a focus on impact, and we should be getting non-nurses to join us," she said. "It is a global profession. We need to get really smart at how we work together." And, she noted, with the threat a global nursing shortage poses to health care access, the time to do that is now. Another nurse leader challenging conceptions of what is possible, not

only for nursing, but for patient care technology, is Patricia Flatley Brennan, director of the National Library of Medicine and associate investigator at the National Institute of Nursing Research.

It was Brennan who kicked off the Nursing Now USA South Florida Lecture Series in February with her dynamic keynote titled, "Visualizing Living and Working Spaces: A Strategy to Support Patients with Chronic Diseases."

Combining a Ph.D. in industrial engineering with an M.S. in nursing, Brennan blends engineering, information technology, and clinical care to understand how virtual technology living spaces can help patients better manage their chronic illnesses. "We need to learn about



From left, Johis Ortega, Barbara Stilwell, and Dean Cindy Munro with future nurse leaders from Miami.

how space engenders health and draws people towards health," she explained. In this way, her research addresses "the care between the care," helping people participate in their own health practices by addressing the spaces where care happens in between clinical appointments, hospitalizations, surgeries, and rehabilitation settings, from following a sodium-restricted diet and managing medications to monitoring their health.

In Brennan's laboratory, full-color, 360-degree, virtual replicas of patients' homes are created to visualize how people use different spaces, where they store health data, what hazards are present, and what modifications need to be made. For example, how does clutter impact self-management?



Barbara Stilwell

Their goal is to understand "how the visual cuing of a room interferes with or supports someone's attempt to go after health activities," said Brennan. "We're studying how households help or interfere with people's ability to take care of themselves. Self-management is key to overall optimum health, but it requires a lot of cognitive energy."

starting and stopping, retracing their steps, wandering—reveal challenges such as cognitive load, confusion, and disorientation.

"The long-term skill of an individual in self-management is interpreting threats correctly and developing creative solutions to barriers," she explained.

Brennan's work toward devising new interventions to influence the practice of care, and to transfer learning from the virtual to the real world, can only be seen as prescient in the present climate of social distancing and self-isolation.

"Nurses must be at the table of innovation," said Brennan. "We have to be out there figuring out how emerging technologies are going to work for patients. To reach into the care between the care, the spaces where people live, we have to accelerate our thinking about how technologies can be used and useful."

Elizabeth Madigan, CEO of Sigma Theta Tau International, closed out the series April 24 with a lecture broadcast via Zoom in English and Spanish. Addressing health care in the era of COVID-19 and the WHO's first-ever State of the World's Nursing Report, released April 7, she said, "This is a more critical time than ever to identify nurse leaders. Think about the Year of the Nurse not just as a celebratory event, though that's important too, but as a way to frame the contributions we make to improving global health." ■

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