

# Advocating For Patients Is An Essential New Year's Resolution

written by Nancy Brent | January 3, 2017

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The New Year is upon us and customarily, you are expected to make resolutions for 2017. A resolution is characterized as a determination, a perseverance, a steadfastness to do something. As a nurse in whatever role you undertake, and as a student nurse during your nursing educational program, one resolution to make, or to re-emphasize, for the New Year is to advocate for all those for whom you provide care.

Advocacy's origin is from the legal term, advocate, which means "a person who assists, defends, pleads, or prosecutes for another".<sup>1</sup>

In nursing, however, advocacy is more complex,<sup>2</sup> despite it being included in many nursing ethics codes, including the American Nurses Association's Code of Ethics for Nurses with Interpretive Statements.<sup>3</sup>

Advocating as a nurse can be difficult and it can be seen in many ways. If you tend to be on the shy side, you may find it very difficult to speak up to your nurse manager or the patient's physician about the patient's care. Or, not wanting to "rock the boat", you may simply ignore one of your colleague's cutting corners when caring for patients. It may also be that sharing your expertise in front of a legislative hearing on an issue about nursing practice and patient care is just too intimidating for you.

These, and other, personal obstacles to fulfilling your obligation to advocate for your patients are not the only hurdles you face. If your nursing administration or your fellow nurse colleagues don't support the sharing of patient care concerns, this corporate culture further impedes nursing advocacy.

One author suggests that one way to overcome this non-support is to use "clear, effective communication" when advocating for your patients. In addition, minimizing any emotional reactions you may have, such as anger or frustration, is important.<sup>4</sup>

Another suggestion that can strengthen you personally as you advocate is to get training in the role. This can be by observing nurses who do advocate well and incorporate their approaches into yours. Workshops and continuing education courses are another way to learn about patient advocacy and incorporating pointers and approaches into your own style.<sup>5</sup>

When all is said and done, however, the role of advocate for your patients is what can protect the patient and provide him or her with the best care possible, both legally and ethically.

So, think about your own strengths and weaknesses when advocating. Were some approaches more successful than others? Who was helpful along the way? When your advocacy did not go as planned, did you identify why?

Remember, too, that the patient is at the core of advocacy. Your voice and actions are to help others hear the patient's decisions or concerns about his or her care.

Make advocacy for your patients one of your New Year's Resolution. You won't regret it. Not only will you meet your legal and ethical obligations governing advocacy, doing so will assist your patients and contribute to you being an even better nurse in 2017.

As this is the last Bulletin for 2017, I would like to wish all of you a Happy, Healthy and Peaceful New Year.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. Black's Law Dictionary Free Online Legal Dictionary, 2<sup>nd</sup>
2. Robert Hanks (2012), "From Our Readers....Practical Approaches to Patient Advocacy Barriers", 7(2) American Nurse Today. Available at: <https://www.americannursetoday.com/from-our-readerspractical-approaches-to-patient-advocacy-barriers/> .
3. American Nurses Association (2015). Code of Ethics for Nurses With Interpretive Statements. Silver Spring, MD: author.
4. Hanks, *supra* note 2.
5. I.d.

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