

YEAR OF THE NURSE

2020

NURSING THE WORLD TO HEALTH

Two centuries after Florence Nightingale's birth, SONHS looks to her legacy of bold leadership for inspiration in unprecedented times.



By Maya Bell



Presaging the hospice movement, she insisted wounded soldiers not die alone. Focused on patient outcomes, she practiced evidence-based medicine more than a century before the term was coined. Promoting good hygiene, sanitation, and nutrition, she pioneered public health.

Given Florence Nightingale's dedication to patient-focused care, Cindy Munro, dean of the School of Nursing and Health Studies, has little doubt the founder of modern nursing would recognize her profession in 2020—the 200th anniversary of her birth.

“Could she have predicted the changes in nursing?” Munro, interviewed in February, said of the legendary social reformer whose initiatives slashed the mortality rate of British soldiers during the Crimean War. “I’m not sure, but she did say nursing would be entirely different in 150 years. I think she would recognize what we’re doing as rooted in the foundation she laid. She definitely set the course and the standards we follow today.”

That is certainly true as we use social distancing and scientifically proven sanitation methods in an effort to staunch the rampant spread of an invisible but virulent enemy on a very different-looking front line than the one Nightingale braved in the 1850s.

Long before the World Health Organization declared the coronavirus COVID-19 a pandemic, the WHO designated 2020 as the International Year of the Nurse and the Midwife to honor Nightingale's legacy and the critical contributions of the world's 20 million nurses. This first-ever global recognition marked the culmination of the three-year Nursing Now campaign to improve universal health by raising the profile and status of nurses and midwives.



With the world facing a nursing shortage and the rising burden of chronic diseases, Nursing Now was compelled to launch in 2018, in collaboration with the WHO and the International Council of Nurses, with support from the Burdett Trust for Nursing. They cited the all-parliamentary Triple Impact Report, which concluded that a strong nursing workforce improves health, promotes gender equality, and supports economic growth.

At SONHS, Dean Munro pledged the school's support for Nursing Now's mission and joined the Coalition and Steering Committee for national member group Nursing Now USA. In addition, SONHS embarked on ambitious programming, presenting its own Nursing Now USA lecture series (see “Nurses at the Table of Innovation,” p. 20) and accepting Nursing Now's 2020 Nightingale Challenge to help empower the next generation of nurses as health leaders, practitioners, and advocates (see “Meet the Next Nightingales,” p. 22).

Nightingale—who founded London's Training School for Nurses in 1860 and published more than 200 books, reports, and pamphlets, including the seminal “Notes on Nursing”—would certainly recognize the value of such mentorship activities. As Munro wrote in an editorial for the *American Journal of Critical Care*, “She understood, as we do today, that mentoring others is an important aspect of improving the workplace and a potent force for improving patient care.”

Nearly 200 years after Nightingale's birth on May 12, 1820, Munro said, it's necessary to raise the profile of nurses because many people still don't understand that they are at the heart of health care, playing critical roles in health promotion, disease prevention, and treatment.



Instead of thinking about it as a very patient-focused, scientific discipline, many people still think of nurses as handmaidens,” Munro said. “But nursing is a very independent profession and, while we do work collaboratively with other health sciences professions, we have our own disciplinary knowledge. We are on the front lines. It is the nurse who does the day-to-day care and the discharge planning or end-of-life planning, or whatever the next phase is. But there's this perception that we work at the direction of the physician, which is not true.”

That certainly wasn't true for Nightingale, who became a national hero in England for her work at the onset of Britain's involvement in the Crimean War in 1854. Over the objections of male military physicians, she led and trained 38 female nurses to care for wounded soldiers at a military field hospital in Turkey. Through her observations and extensive record-keeping, she realized more soldiers died from infections than from their injuries and pressed for measures to reduce overcrowding and improve hygiene, sanitation, ventilation, and natural light. After her initiatives were implemented, the mortality rate plummeted from 42.7 percent to 2.7 percent.

“She was not working for any physician,” Munro said. “She was working for the good of the soldiers in the Crimean War, and all the sanitation and environmental control measures she implemented came right out of her sense of nursing. They were not anything she was directed to do. She did not have a guidebook. She wrote our guidebook, and it has withstood the test of time.”