

NURSES CARAVAN ROLLING OVER RACISM



By Judy Sheridan-Gonzalez, RN
NYSNA President



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Reflections on the convention

“Wow! Awesome! Amazing!” That was the overwhelming consensus regarding the content, workshops and booths at the NYSNA Convention.

Again, nurses put NYSNA on the map with an outdoor rally and memorial protesting unsafe fracking oil train transport that was reported by state and national media outlets (see p. 8).

The interactive workshops provided “hands-on” learning experiences for members hungry to make changes back home. Some presentations, particularly the one by Dr. Camara Jones, President-elect of the American Public Health Association, were of extremely high intellectual content, but also touched a chord that spurred NYSNA into action—a collective decision to travel to Nanuet with hundreds of members to protest a discriminatory *Pennysaver* ad by Interim Healthcare: “No Haitians” need apply (see p. 3).

Young leaders shine

The heart-rending, heroic testimonials during our Young Leaders presentation knocked us off our feet and gave us hope for the future. Nuts and bolts reports by seasoned leaders describing how they achieved victories—as well as how they face serious challenges—illustrated the sophistication of nurses as they navigate the complex waters of the merger and acquisition frenzy.

The fantastic band and DJ—and the dazzling appearance of Sister Sledge—brought us together in the culture of music and dance, illustrating that indeed, “We are Family” (see pp. 6-7).

Nevertheless, problems do arise. When 600 or more people get together in one room, full and diverse participation can be enormously difficult. Raising open-ended issues, or concepts without time to reflect and discuss in advance, and then navigating Robert’s Rules in this context can lead to frustration. Having little or no time for open discussion is clearly not an option; however, we must create an environment—and

adequate time—for members, whenever we assemble, to raise and discuss issues that matter.

So the question of our structure and functioning arises. When our S-3 Slate was elected four years ago, we inherited an organizational format that was designed by and for a group of elite nurses who were far removed from the bedside. The structure

(as mandated by current bylaws) makes this next to impossible.

Some NYSNA structures were invented as afterthoughts to give staff nurses a place to blow off steam (or to manipulate the law): Delegate Assembly, Congress, the Direct Care Provider Unit, the Med-Surg Unit and the initial PFG concept are some examples. Until we changed the bylaws at the May



NYSNA Convention 2015, City Center, Main Hall, Saratoga Springs

and function of both NYSNA and its Convention, with its internal focus (rules, policies, process, abstractions), impeded our goal to change healthcare delivery and support nurses’ struggles. Attending Convention was like attending a large tea party—only we didn’t have a cup—or even a tea bag.

The Board, while recognizing NYSNA’s structural problems, felt compelled to prioritize the real time needs of members in countering employer and system abuses first. We had no choice but to down-triage the complex task of structural realignment.

Participatory democracy

Participatory democracy is not a one-time affair. It needs to be an ongoing process that starts at the local level and branches out in an organized, egalitarian fashion. How do we bring members together en masse in a way that facilitates dramatic and inclusive debate? Having a rigid agenda

2012 Javits Center meeting giving power to bedside nurses for the first time, union nurses had no real collective power at all in NYSNA. Now we do.

We welcome your ideas

I want to reiterate that one of our challenges was simply having enough time at Voting Body. We must continually evaluate our structure and rules to make sure members’ voices are heard. We must complete the job begun four years ago and move into the 21st Century.

For now, I want to thank members and staff who participated in this Convention, making it an unforgettable experience. “Play it forward” to your workplaces so that the real on-the-ground work continues—and don’t hesitate to contact us with your ideas and concerns, any time of the year.

To quote one nurse presenter quoting Ghandi: *“Be the change you wish to see in the world.”*

Nurses caravan rolling over racism

As news of a repugnant, racist reference to Haitian nurses first reached the Convention, members were appalled and disgusted. The racist reference appeared in an advertisement placed by Interim Healthcare and ran in the *Pennysaver* publication distributed in Rockland County, NY.

"We were outraged by this ad," said Frantz Descorbeth, RN, a member of Haitian origin who works at Interfaith Medical Center, Brooklyn. "But, the support we received from other members was swift and strong."

Candlelight vigil

NYSNA immediately issued a statement, made jointly by President Judy Sheridan-Gonzalez, RN, and First Vice President Marva Wade, RN. "When we were informed of the disgusting and alarmingly racist and sexist advertisement ... asking no Haitian nurses apply for an agency home healthcare job, many of our members were visibly shocked and saddened."

News of an investigation of the matter by New York State Attorney General Eric Schneiderman was publicly supported by NYSNA, as well.

As the Convention was winding down, however, NYSNA was winding up: a demonstration of support for Haitian members—and against racism and bigotry—was planned during the return trip of members traveling home by bus.

On the evening of October 21, hundreds of members stopped outside the offices of Interim Healthcare in Nanuet, NY—where the offensive ad had been written—to shine a light through bus windows in a candlelight vigil of solidarity with Haitian colleagues (see cover and photo, bottom).

With a "NYSNA Rolling Over Racism" banner as backdrop, and TV news cameras rolling, three NYSNA members from Haiti descended the buses to speak and answer questions. Mr. Descorbeth was among them. "We are here with our union members to protest this racist ad. All nurses are com-

mitted to quality care for all our patients. That's what we do."

"There is no place for bigotry, hatred and racism in our state," said Betty Hyppolite, RN, of Interfaith Medical Center.

"We care for all"

"We care for all. We don't discriminate against anybody," Edwige Descorbeth, RN, told the cameras. She works at Kings County Medical Center and Kingsbrook Jewish Medical Center in Brooklyn.

NYSNA Executive Director Jill Furillo, RN, also spoke outside Interim's offices. "This is a rolling candlelight vigil in protest against this horrible discrimination against nurses and ultimately against patients," she told the press. "We appreciate the role the Attorney General has played and how swiftly he acted here."

The next day, NYSNA joined the Haitian American Nurses Association and City Council Member Dr. Mathieu Eugene of Brooklyn at a press conference at City Hall condemning Interim Healthcare. Dr. Eugene is the first Haitian-born official elected to the New York City Council.

Anne Bové, RN, President of NYSNA's HHC/Mayorals Executive Council, shared these words:

"On behalf of the 37,000 members of the New York State Nurses Association, we stand with leaders within the Haitian community, elected officials and our brothers and sisters in healthcare to condemn this incident and commit ourselves to fight against injustice in all of its forms."

"Last night, as hundreds of NYSNA nurses left our state convention, many of us caravanned via coach bus to the offices of Interim Healthcare in Nanuet to show our disdain for their actions. ... An attack on one of us is an attack on us all, and NYSNA is here to fight back."



Betty Hyppolite, RN



Edwige Descorbeth, RN



Nurses speaking to press outside Interim Healthcare's offices



Two of the many buses carrying hundreds of NYSNA members at the candlelight vigil against racism, outside Interim Healthcare's offices in Nanuet, NY



New York City Council Member Dr. Mathieu Eugene, with NYSNA and other supporters, at a City Hall press conference, October 22

THE COVER: NYSNA members aboard buses returning from the 2015 Convention in a candlelight vigil against a racist ad targeting Haitian nurses. The vigil took place outside the offices of Interim Healthcare, Nanuet, NY, on October 21.

Caring for *all* New Yorkers

By Jill Furillo, RN, NYSNA
Executive Director



Life expectancy in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn is 11 years less than it is in Manhattan's Financial District

Patient advocacy is what defines NYSNA. That was a resounding message of our 2015 Convention. That advocacy starts at the bedside and extends to our communities, and beyond, where we assess and address social and economic conditions—root causes of much of the illness we treat.

In the next year we will sharpen our focus on promoting healthcare equity throughout the state, invoking our own unity, working with coalitions and demanding decent living conditions and access to quality care for all New Yorkers.

Here are some recently-released facts to consider: The New York City Department of Health in October released updated data on community health profiles for Kings County (Brooklyn), and will release updates on each of New York City's 59 communities over the coming weeks. For the first time, the profiles track environmental and social measures such as housing quality, incarceration rates, air pollution, and food access and their impact on life expectancy and quality of life and paint a detailed picture of neighborhood health.

Disparities are stark

This data, combined with the latest from New York State's Prevention Agenda and The Commonwealth Fund, show the persistence and, in some cases, growth of disparities in healthcare and outcomes between rich and poor in New York State.

Life expectancy in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn is 11 years less than it is in Manhattan's Financial District, and Brownsville infants are four-times as likely to die as infants than those in Brooklyn's Park Slope. Maternal mortality rates in Essex, Lewis and Schuyler Counties are five-times greater than in other areas of the state. Franklin County has the state's highest average annual diabetes death rate while Hamilton County has the lowest.

New York City has a higher percentage of obese children and adolescents than any other area of the state. New Yorkers living in the Mid-Hudson or North Country are less likely to have a regular healthcare provider than those living in the Finger Lakes and Capital Region.

Insurance gaps

Even those with insurance are at risk. Although New York does a good job of insuring children, the same is not true for adults. Lack of

living conditions and help New Yorkers—all New Yorkers—have healthier lives.

Universal, quality care

Our union is striving to make quality care the norm in every single facility. *The Safe Staffing for Quality Care Act* is essential to evening out the extremes in hospital-based care and ensuring that every New Yorker gets the nursing care they deserve, regardless of their zip code. Statewide nurse-to-patient ratios



South Bronx, NY

insurance, coverage gaps for certain services, high deductibles and/or other out-of-pocket costs are growing, and they are leading people to hold back on getting the healthcare they need. Fifteen percent of New Yorkers went without needed care in the past year because of costs. Only 44 percent of adults age 50 and above received recommended preventive care, such as colon cancer screening, mammograms, pap smears and flu shots at appropriate ages.

Working with others

NYSNA is working with housing advocates, service sector wage activists, environmental groups, public health experts in and out of government, other unions and local and state politicians to improve

would serve to provide a uniform high quality standard of care and work to eliminate variance among communities in staffing-dependent outcome indicators such as readmissions.

In addition, *NY Health*, a single-payer health system for all New Yorkers, would level the playing field between the insurance haves and have nots and erase the gaps in care and outcomes that result from differences in insurance coverage and out-of-pocket costs. Single payer is a system that makes patient need *the* priority.

We have extended our job of caring for all New Yorkers beyond the bedside. No one is more motivated and in motion than NYSNA nurses.

NYSNA fully engaged on Long Island

It's been a busy season for NYSNA members on Long Island. In recent months, LI members were raising funds for charities, marching in parades, and conducting community health outreach, while continuing their ongoing push for safe staffing and fair contracts.

NYSNA's visibility on Long Island is growing, as members wearing their NYSNA scrubs are making connections that build better patient care and stronger communities. JenMarie Byrnes, RN, St. Joseph Hospital, Bethpage, explained it this way: "We want our communities to know us, to understand what we're fighting for, and to support our NYSNA advocacy efforts so that we can have the greatest impact." Tammy Miller, RN at St. Catherine of Sienna Medical Center in Smithtown, said, "Informed community members sign petitions and show other forms of support for our contract and legislative efforts to improve patient care."

Celebrating our communities

NYSNA members from St. Joseph, St. Catherine of Sienna, St. Charles Hospital in Port Jefferson, Southside Hospital in Bay Shore, and Syosset Hospital and their families were front and center at the weeklong celebration marking Smithtown's 350th anniversary. NYSNA was a sponsor of the festivities, which included a fireworks display on August 19 and a parade on September 26.

NYSNA's red tent was pitched early in the day as the community awaited the show. Members from St. Joseph, St. Catherine of Sienna and Syosset collected signatures on petitions in support of safe staffing legislation. The following week, 30 members from St. Catherine of Sienna and Southside, with friends and family, rode and marched along side the NYSNA float. Ms. Miller was among them. "It was great to be involved in the community where I work and to see the crowd be so supportive of nurses. They cheered us on and sent a lot of love our way."

That same day in Nassau County, members from Franklin Hospital Medical Center and St. Joseph Hospital served as volunteers at the NYSNA-sponsored Valley Stream



Members from St. Catherine of Sienna and Southside, along with their families, helped Smithtown celebrate its 350th anniversary.

Community Fest. The NYSNA booth was the fair's busiest, with six members speaking about safe staffing legislation. They collected 900 signatures in support of the bill. NYS Assembly Member Michaelle Solages was among the many who stopped by to express support.

Giving back to our communities

NYSNA nurses and family members scored a double by supporting the John Thiessen Children's Foundation while attending a Long Island Ducks minor league baseball game. The Foundation equips hospitals and child-care facilities with therapeutic and recreational equipment, supports families with medical expenses and provides toys to sick and needy children.

The group of 150 members from across Long Island raised about \$500 for Thiessen. This year's theme: "Save a life you are a hero; save hundreds of lives you are an RN."

Keeping Long Islanders healthy

Long Islanders enjoy access to world-class beaches, but that means they have to be vigilant when it comes to sun exposure. On September 13, NYSNA participated in Assemblyman Joseph Saladino's annual Marine and Outdoor Recreation Expo at Captree State Park.

The event featured demonstrations on wildlife education, boat and water safety, renewable energy, and more. Seven NYSNA members from St. Joseph Hospital, Franklin

Hospital Medical Center and Syosset Hospital spoke about how to monitor for skin cancer.

The nurses also used the day to talk with the community about the importance of safe staffing at St. Joseph, St. Charles and St. Catherine of Sienna and gathered nearly 400 petition signatures in support of safe staffing legislation.



Members gathered at Sunken Meadow State Park on September 19 for Smithtown's anniversary fireworks celebration.



Members at the September 13 Marine Expo



"AS A young nurse, I want to learn more about our union and what we're able to offer, and also to push my fellow colleagues to involve themselves in the union, because they are the union."

*Rhea Marie-Villavicencio, RN
Bellevue*



"NYSNA'S convention provides the unique experience of having so many nurses in one spot."

*Michael Pattison, RN
St. Elizabeth*



"WHEN THEY started to privatize different areas and fire nurses, I went on every unit on every

one of my shifts, and we banded together. We made a difference, we showed them that we're not going to stand for this anymore."

*Lahina Abdussabur-Williams, RN
Woodhull*



A year of great strides celebrated

When Trish Kuhn, RN, a newly-elected NYSNA board member from Utica, NY, stepped to the podium of the Opening Plenary of Convention 2015 in Saratoga Springs, her voice resonated. "We have felt the unity this year!" she exclaimed. "We are the leading voice to take profit out of healthcare!"

NYSNA President Judy Sheridan-Gonzalez, RN, (above, center) was next to speak. "We insist that all human beings have the right to healthcare, including the right to quality nursing care," she said. "We advocate for safe housing, decent jobs, child care, elder care and all the things that make our world a better place."

Following her to the fore were nearly a score of speakers, members—some also serving on NYSNA's board of directors—from across the state. Significant contract wins, safe staffing and single payer campaigning, community outreach, young nurse leadership, safety net hospitals, public health in rural counties: these were among the topics presented to a room of 700 nurses.

Anne Bové, RN and President of NYSNA's HHC/Mayorals Executive Council, spoke to the enduring role of public hospitals and introduced two RNs from Bellevue Hospital Center in Manhattan, Yanick Charles, RN, and Jane Galo, RN. Both had provided care to Ebola patient Dr. Craig Spencer and related their experiences. "It is an inherent and integral trait of a nurse



Saratoga Springs Mayor Joanne Yepson addressing the Convention

to take care of anybody irregardless of the disease or situation," said Ms. Galo. "Patient care is the priority and we must just do it! We are called to help humanity with justice, and to act tenderly. Nurses rock!"

In the course of the next two days, members attended clinical and labor education courses: LEAN management, retirement, single payer, POAs. Films were screened on labor issues, including "We Are Wisconsin: Nurses Respond to a Crisis in Labor." The Convention schedule was full, and opportunities to learn and share were many.

There were important receptions. NYSNA's Committee on

Social & Civil Rights hosted Dr. Camara P. Jones, president-elect of the American Public Health Association and an expert on health disparities and the impact of racism on the health and well-being of the nation (see page 9).

Marie Kelly, CEO of the Ontario Nurses Association—a union of nurses and nursing students head-



Nurses rock to "We Are Family" performed by none other



Seth Dressekie, RN, and NYSNA Board Member



Convention Workshop: Anatomy of an RN Protest of Assignment Campaign to Protect Patients

quartered in Toronto, spoke of the tradition of universal care in the Canadian system. She also related her experiences on a picket line during her two decades working for the United Steelworkers Union.

Aileen Gunther, the State Assembly Member from Sullivan and Orange Counties, is an RN and staunch supporter of nursing issues, including The Safe Staffing for Quality Care Act. She was one of many politicians who spoke at the Plenary Panel: "Advancing the Role of Nurses in the Health of Our Communities." Others included NYS Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli, who handed over a reimbursement check for more than \$41,000 to NYSNA (see below), and State Assembly Members Richard Gottfried, Angelo



Five of the recipients of the Contract Action Hero Award: (from left) Bernita Stewart, RN; Venus Rulona, RN; Karines Reyes, RN; Andrew Davis, RN; Dawn Minerve, RN

Santabarbara, Shelley Mayer and Al Graf. State Senators Adriano Espaillat and Marc Panepinto also were present to thank NYSNA members for hard work and commitment to patient care and com-

munity. Community and political campaign booths gave out literature and signed up many.

An awards ceremony was very moving. Alexandra Robbins, author, who has shown a profound understanding for when NYSNA says, "We Need More Nurses," was honored with "Nursing in the Public Eye Award." Awards went to more than a dozen NYSNA members and others for extraordinary commitment to patients, public health and union work.

When it was time to kick off our shoes, members danced to the music of Sister Sledge!

"We Are Family" sung by Karen Sledge ushered the room into an evening of music and dance.



her than Karen Sledge of Sister Sledge



State Assembly Member Aileen Gunther, RN

"I GO to the convention every year. I think it's an invaluable time to learn new techniques for dealing with the hospital inside of your union. It's good to get re-invigorated every year on our goals and how to move forward."

*Lea Nason, RN
Westchester Medical Center*



"OUR staffing has improved since our NYSNA representative asked us to write protests of assignment. Now, in some units, when the census is too large, the supervisor will call for backup and get somebody to help you. Before, it wasn't like that. They'd just ask you to manage, which is very dangerous to our patients."

*Okeoma Anaba-Nwaotbe, RN
Queens HC*



Marie Kelly, CEO, Ontario Nurses Assoc.



1st VP Marva Wade, RN, and President Judy Sheridan-Gonzalez, RN, receiving a check from NYS Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli



Assembly Member Adriano Espaillat



Mario Cilento, President, NYS AFL-CIO, received NYSNA's "Solidarity Award"

'No' to fracking oil trains!

ON SCHEDULE, a freight train full up with toxic, highly-combustible fracking oil travels through New York State and is loaded on to tankers in Albany. The trains roll through dozens of communities, including Saratoga Springs, the site of our Convention. Hundreds of NYSNA nurses took time on the morning of October 21 to rally at those train tracks and to stand with the community against this horrendous health hazard.

For NYSNA nurses, climate change leads a list public health crises. We deal with the effects of carbon pollution in our hospitals every day. Extreme weather events, like Super Storm Sandy, are a recurring threat.

In Saratoga Springs that threat comes from the transportation of fracking fuel from Canada.

Commemorating 47 deaths

On July 6, 2013, a fracking oil train derailed in downtown Lac-Megantic, Quebec—a town about the size of Saratoga Springs. Multiple tank cars exploded, leveling the downtown, unleashing a toxic fire and killing 47 people. The nearby river was so contaminated by hydrocarbons that drinking water of towns 50 miles away was poisoned.

"We have big oil companies that have decided that it is worth the risk and the price to put our lives in danger by transporting fracking oil by rail in outdated and unsafe rail cars," Pat Kane, RN and NYSNA Treasurer, told the rally.

To commemorate the loss of lives, a "die-in" was staged with 47 members and staff. It was a solemn moment.

After, members heard from community advocates and concerned politicians in a round of speeches,

a powerful display of support and call to action.

"They do it through poor neighborhoods or neighborhoods of color," said Mark Emanation, lead organizer of Citizen Action in the Capital Region. Food & Water Watch was there, a leading organization fighting fracking in NYS. Althea Mullarkey, of Scenic Hudson, decried freight with "the volatility of dynamite" transported in tank cars "suitable for orange juice or vegetable oil." And Jeff Jones, an activist in the community, displayed a map, explaining that "351 schools are within one mile of the tracks these trains travel on." Organizers from Sustainable Saratoga also spoke.

Assembly Members Phil Steck, Richard Gottfried and Patricia Fahey weighed in with support, as well.

"We must demand a just transition," said Pat Kane, "so that workers in the fossil fuel industry,



Pat Kane, RN, NYSNA Treasurer

especially our brothers and sisters who have good union jobs in that industry, are able to transition to good jobs that are healthier not only for them but for the entire earth."

On October 27, Gov. Cuomo announced that inspections of 235 oil tank cars along 195 miles of track had revealed critical defects. This came after the "public outcry over the safety of the trains increased," press reports stated.



Shana Davis, VP, Capital District AFL-CIO



Assembly Member Richard Gottfried



Rabbi Linda Motzkin, Temple Sinai, Saratoga Springs



Assembly Member Phil Steck



Assembly Member Patricia Fahey



Mark Emanation, Capital Region Citizen Action



Jeff Jones, Capital Region activist and policy expert



Rally "die-in" commemorating 47 deaths in Lac-Megantic, Quebec



Young nurses take the lead

The generation of nurses that is on the cusp of retirement has seen radical changes in healthcare. When they started, there were no electronic medical records or lifting devices, few safety protections, and low wages. This generation won better wages and working conditions and more respect for the profession. More recently, they have experienced hospital closures, privatization and the corporatization of healthcare. How will the younger generation step up to these new challenges? That was the major theme of the Young Nurse Leaders Plenary at Convention this year.

If there was any question that young nurses would not rise to these new challenges, it was quickly answered by the three young nurse leaders who took the stage at Convention: Jalisa Saud, Michelle Rodriguez and Dawn Minerve. These young RN leaders spoke passionately about winning respect, greater decision-making power in their facilities, and safe staffing for all nurses.

Each young leader spoke from the heart about their particular path to becoming a leader, leaving older and younger nurses in the audience with a lot to think about.

Being active

Jalisa Saud, RN, spoke about the importance of getting educated both in nursing and in the union, through steward training and other opportunities to get active, because as she put it, “Knowledge is power.”

“Education really begins on your unit—with your team,” said Jalisa. “To build your army, you need to show young people leadership. You need to show younger people who may not be active in the union what they can do. We’ve all heard that nurses eat their young, but that’s changing. Nurses of all ages are learning to become better leaders and mentors.”

Michelle Gonzalez spoke about what led her to become a nurse. Growing up in the Bronx, she saw first hand how her uncle experienced shortcomings in the healthcare environment, and she was dedicated to changing that.

She said, “I always think of the quote from Ghandi, ‘Be the change



Four young nurse leaders pose after their dynamic Convention presentation on challenges in corporate healthcare and the crisis in care access. They are joined by NYSNA board members and NYSNA's executive director. (left-right) NYSNA President Judy Sheridan-Gonzalez, RN; NYSNA Executive Director Jill Furillo, RN; Dawn Minerve, RN, New York-Presbyterian; NYSNA Second Vice President Anthony Ciampa, RN; Jilisa Saud, RN, Coney Island Hospital; Ann Naguit, RN, Mount Sinai; and Michelle Gonzalez, RN, Montefiore Moses.

that you wish to see in the world.’ I felt that if I became a nurse, I could be that change.”

Young nurse motivations

Michelle pointed to all the leaders and mentors at her hospital who helped put her on the path to leadership, always asking her to get involved and pushing her to be her best.

Dawn Minerve spoke eloquently about her struggle to find her voice and her power as a young nurse. And she shared her sense of being isolated at work, like “a toddler dropped into the deep end and told to swim.”

“At first, I would pray every morning that nothing terrible hap-

pens today, and then get home at night and worry that I missed something because we were so understaffed,” explained Dawn. “My leadership developed organically from a place of frustration. NYSNA helped give me my voice and the power to change what I saw was wrong in my hospital.”

NYSNA's young leaders are inspiring and an essential part of our growing strength. They are among a new generation of leaders coming up in NYSNA, who have picked up the stethoscopes and POAs as the older generation retires. And they are already showing they are more than ready to tell hospital executives: we say “no” to profits over patients.



Anne Bové, RN, Bellevue Hospital and President, NYSNA's HHC/Mayorals Executive Council, presents a “Patient Voice Award” to Clarette Fontanelle of Bronx, NY. Ms. Fontanelle is a chronic dialysis patient at Kings County Hospital Center and was a dedicated voice for patients and the community in a winning effort to stop the for-profit takeover of the Kings County dialysis unit and three others in the HHC system this spring.

The wisdom of Dr. Camara P. Jones shared at Convention

Camara P. Jones, MD, is president-elect of the American Public Health Association and a family physician and epidemiologist focusing on the impacts of racism on the health and well-being of the nation. Dr. Jones was honored at a Convention reception hosted by the NYSNA Committee for Social Justice & Civil Rights. On the second Conference day, she delivered a compelling presentation, “Health Disparities and the Importance of Identifying and Addressing Racism: a Primer,” where she also answered questions from members.

Dr. Camara Jones shared this thought:

“We unfortunately have lots of evidence about differences in the quality of care received within our healthcare system, by race or by ethnicity.

“There are three levels at which health disparities arise: differences in quality of care, differences in access to care, and differences in underlying exposures and opportunities. It’s like a huge iceberg. The huge, hidden base is the differences in the quality and conditions of our lives. Then, those who are made sicker are sometimes the same ones that are further frustrated because of limited access to the system. Then, even the lucky ones who get into the system are sometimes further injured because of differences in quality of care.”



Nurses Shine at NYS Fair

PUTTING OUT THE WORD on patient advocacy, safe staffing, and single payer to community allies, NYSNA members participated in The Great New York State Fair this year. In what has become an annual tradition from August through Labor Day, NYSNA members and staff hosted an exhibit at the state's fairgrounds outside Syracuse.

The Fair is a showcase of New York's finest—from agriculture to education, entertainment and technology and attracts nearly a million visitors from across the state, country, and globe. Members staffing the NYSNA booth inside the fairground's Science and Industry Building met thousands of visitors, raising issues and answering questions about nursing and healthcare. Members also spoke with current and prospective students about the rewards of a nursing career.

NYSNA's 2015 exhibit focused on our two key legislative priorities: the Safe Staffing for Quality Care Act and NY Health, legislation that will create a single-payer system for New York State. NYSNA staff and member volunteers spoke with a steady flow of Fair visitors over the course of the twelve-day event. Altogether, we collected more than 6,000 signatures in support of the safe staffing bill and 2,174

for NY Health. State Comptroller Tom DiNapoli was among those who stopped by our exhibit to congratulate members on their work on behalf of the health of New Yorkers.

Support for Central NY Nurses

The Fair also provided a forum for spotlighting the work of our members at several nearby Central New York hospitals. Many of the volunteers staffing the NYSNA booth spend their days (or nights) caring for patients at Oneida Healthcare Center, Samaritan Medical Center and St. Elizabeth Medical Center and are engaged in campaigns for contract renewals. The state fair was an opportunity for them to share information about safe staffing and quality care issues with their Syracuse-area neighbors. Their message was clearly heard: 1,329 community residents signed a petition calling on the Central New York hospitals to reach a fair deal with the nurses.

Patricia Kuhn, RN, St. Elizabeth Medical Center, and a NYSNA Board Member, encouraged more members to get involved next year.



JoyLynn Wing, RN with Onondaga County, spoke with petition signers

“Working the NYSNA booth at the State Fair is an amazing experience. This was my second year and every bit as exciting as the first. Many visitors returned and specifically looked for the NYSNA booth and asked for petitions to sign. The Fair is a great venue for getting the word out about important health policy issues and NYSNA's role in fighting for our communities.”

Mark your calendar for 2016

So mark your calendar and plan to volunteer at the NYSNA booth at the 2016 Great New York State Fair, scheduled for August 25 through September 5. It's fun, you'll meet thousands of friendly people, and take an active part in a 150 year-old New York tradition.



Two of the thousands of petition signers who stopped by the NYSNA exhibit at the 2015 New York State Fair



Wendy Czajak, RN, Onondaga County LBU president, addresses the press.



Western members gain new tool in staffing fight

Members from Western New York gathered for an introduction to a new staffing data collection system and a presentation by NYSNA President Judy Sheridan-Gonzalez, RN, on September 23 in Buffalo.

Members learned that a “Safe Staffing Captain” in each NYSNA unit can text information about an unsafe ratio (e.g., 3–15) in real time, directly to NYSNA, where the data will be recorded and aggregated. The new tool aims to capitalize on the convenience of texting to bolster NYSNA’s staffing research efforts.

President Sheridan-Gonzalez spoke about NYSNA’s transforming itself into a member-driven union. “Three years ago we decided that nurses, not managers and supervisors, should be in charge of our union.”



The Western Inter-Regional meeting drew members from Erie County Medical Center, Brooks Memorial Hospital and Terrace View Long Term Care, many of them first-time attendees.



New York City members with Mayor Bill de Blasio at the September 12 Labor Day Parade.



Martha Wilcox, RN with Sullivan County, helped staff the NYSNA booth at the Kingston Farmers Market on September 26 and spoke with community members about the importance of safe staffing.



Members at the Central Inter-Regional on October 14.

Central NY members demand greater say in future of community’s health

The Central Inter-Regional on October 14 brought together members from St. Elizabeth Medical Center, Oneida Healthcare Center, Onondaga County Health Department, and Hospice & Palliative Care of New Hartford who packed the room to hear important updates on the future of healthcare in their community and from NYSNA President Judy Sheridan-Gonzalez, RN.

The main topic was Oneida County’s plan for a new hospital to be built with \$300 million in state funding; the county is still deciding on the new facility’s location and size. Guest speaker Assembly Member Anthony Brindisi (AD 119) said that funds come with

requirements of public input and consideration of patient need. “NYSNA’s message of putting patients first is important and carries a lot of weight in the state and in the Assembly,” he said.

RNs told Brindisi that Oneida County had not met the requirements. “This has built distrust,” said Trish Kuhn, St. Elizabeth RN and NYSNA board member. “We’ve only had one committee meeting on the future of the hospital in six months. This does not make for open dialogue on how best to protect patient care.”

The RNs are coordinating a town hall meeting to help get the facts out and ensure that patients and frontline caregivers are heard on this vital project.



A delegation of NYSNA nurses gathered to help welcome Pope Francis to New York City on September 25.

Fall is hurricane season

Fall has always brought hurricane season to the East Coast, but climate change means extreme weather events such as Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy are becoming increasingly “normal”.

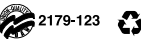
Hospitals should be prepared to activate their Emergency Operations Plan and readying themselves and their staffs for the potential effects of a major storm: increased patient load, power outages and communication disruptions, and infrastructure damage. If mandated to work, NYSNA members should have plans for childcare, elder care and pet care as well as alternate means of transportation.

A major storm can be a difficult time for everyone impacted. Help lessen the stress on your own family by ensuring you have adequate supplies of fresh water, non-perishable food, a week’s worth of medications, portable chargers for cell phones, a battery-operated radio, flashlights and batteries, cash, and first aid supplies on hand. Plus, if you live in a flood-prone area, know your “zone” in case of evacuation orders.

For more information on storm-preparedness, check the NYSNA website for special alerts.

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INSIDE



Rolling over racism, p. 3



'No' to fracking oil trains, p. 8

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Convention coverage, pp. 6-9