Honoring Heritage, Demanding Justice

A call to action for nursing's future

By Tina Loarte-Rodriguez, DNP, RN, CPPS, CPHRM

At a free clinic in Texas, a nurse educates a frightened mother on how to treat her son's asthma—knowing the family avoids the ED for fear of immigration enforcement. In a California research lab, a community health project on diabetes in Hispanic/Latine populations is halted after funding is cut. In Washington, DC, advocates warn that eliminating language access services will leave millions struggling to navigate care.

These are not isolated stories. They are daily realities for many Hispanic/Latine patients, nurses, and communities and remind us that health equity cannot exist in an environment of fear and exclusion. As nurses, we must meet this moment with resolve.

This month's issue of *AJN* is a bold step forward—centering the voices of Hispanic/Latine nurses and calling on our profession to lead with justice, equity, and humanity. As we celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month, let us honor the contributions of Hispanic/Latine nurses and the communities we serve. While Hispanic/Latine Americans make up nearly one-fifth of the U.S. population, deep inequities persist. Hispanic/Latine patients face systemic barriers: limited access to care, language obstacles, and socioeconomic disparities leading to poorer outcomes. Meanwhile, Hispanic/Latine nurses remain underrepresented in the workforce and leadership roles. This month—and every month—we must advance health equity, break systemic barriers, confront racism, and elevate representation in nursing.

Health equity for Hispanic/Latine communities cannot wait. Nearly 17% of Hispanic/Latine Americans remain uninsured, one in four lack a regular health care provider, and language barriers impact millions. In the face of these challenges, Hispanic/Latine communities demonstrate extraordinary resilience. *Promotores de salud* (community health workers) and Hispanic/Latine nurses bridge critical gaps, delivering culturally responsive care and trusted guidance. Their work is proof that community-driven solutions are essential to achieving true equity.

Equity in nursing means building a workforce that reflects the communities it serves. Yet only 7% of U.S. RNs and less than 5% of nursing faculty identify as Hispanic/Latine. Cultural congruence between providers and patients improves communication, trust, and health outcomes—especially when care is delivered in the patient's preferred language. Building a nursing workforce that mirrors our communities is how we move from equity as an ideal to equity in action.

This special issue celebrates resilience and advocacy. The cover features artwork by Daniel Suárez-Baquero and Nelson Martinez depicting a resplendent quetzal—a bird revered in Mesoamerican mythology as a symbol of liberty and spiritual transcendence. Other features include an interview with Paule V. Joseph and an article by Jimmy Reyes describing a community health worker program to help bridge gaps in care in underserved immigrant populations. Creative works by Luis Alejandro Roldán Cubides and Michael Williams capture hope and heritage through poetry. Mimi Guiracocha shares examples of community-focused public health nursing, and Julian Leandro Gallegos and Kim A. Kim challenge us to build a more inclusive profession in their *Focus on DEI* column. These leaders remind us that nurses lead change—through hands-on care, community advocacy, and bold voices in the policy arena.

This issue calls us to action. As a profession, we must commit to:

- **Reckoning with racism.** We must confront nursing's history of racism and exclusion. We cannot promote equity for patients without also advancing equity for nurses. Honest dialogue and collective healing are essential.
- **Advancing health equity.** Advocate for policies that expand access to care—improving insurance coverage, investing in community clinics, and eliminating disparities—so no one is denied care because of who they are or where they live.
- **Breaking barriers.** Establish culturally responsive care as the standard—and hold senior leaders and boards accountable to it. Health care organizations should provide ongoing training in cultural humility, ensure robust language access, and fully integrate National CLAS (Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services) Standards into policies and practices.
- **Elevating representation.** Mentor, recruit, sponsor, and promote Hispanic/Latine nurses into leadership roles. Representation matters—at every level.
- **Empowering communities.** Partner with community health workers and grassroots advocates. Listening to solutions from within Hispanic/Latine communities ensures that those most impacted help shape the future of health care.

The legacy of Hispanic and Latine nurses is one of courage, compassion, and an unwavering pursuit of *justicia* in health. Nursing must embody the equity it champions: by reckoning with racism, fostering healing within our profession, and elevating diverse nurse leaders who reflect and serve our communities.

Our journey continues—*nuestro camino sigue*—and with integrity and collective purpose, we will build a more just, inclusive, and healthier future for all. Health care is a human right. Yet that right remains under siege in too many Hispanic/Latine communities—from deportation raids that deter families from seeking care, to rollbacks in public health programs, to the erasure of minority health research.

As nurses, we cannot look away. This issue of *AJN* joins the voices of our communities in calling us to take bold steps to scale and sustain equitable care and honor the dignity of every person we serve. Let us unite in purpose, lead with knowledge, act with courage, and stand in unshakable solidarity. ▼



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