

After the party: One step forward, 200 years back...

Contribution from a reader who wishes to withhold their identity.

Happy Birthday Florence. Technically 200 years old last week. Apologies, but due to social distancing measures we cannot throw you a party.

The good news is that nurses are rightly in the media spotlight today more than ever. The bad news Florence is that we have a problem.

We need you right now. The nursing profession you strived to raise has been side-lined. Our profession's leaders are passionate and working hard to represent nursing but we fear the deed is done.

I know that you would have used your social status, passion for science, statistics and research to influence the voice of nursing reason on effective public health interventions.

... we then need those creating guidance in London offices to 'walk in our shoes', to stand next to health care professionals as they do their job using commercial or makeshift PPE

What coronavirus advice would come from your lips that would cause pause and consideration among politicians and public alike?

As a novel infection, coronavirus has been seized with delight by scientists and microbiologists; an understandable lifetime 'dream' to dive into the unknown at a cellular level and bask in the science.

The novelty and science are not lost on nurses either as we consider the best practical

approach to break the cycle of infection in the most challenging of situations. Unlike other pandemics or outbreaks of international importance however, we are not around the coronavirus table.

We do not sit with our esteemed medical colleagues and scientists to bring practical and holistic perspectives on behalf of health and care providers and carers.

Only we know what the 'science' means to nurses and nursing but our profile as an equal and essential profession in such circles feels forgotten and neglected.

From the beginning the Chief Medical Officer stood abreast with the Prime Minister daily to discuss the state of infection in the UK; he has no

regular nurse consult visible, and men far outnumber women on the podium.

The nursing voice is absent from national decision-making fora whose diktat affect each and every one of us.

I am sure Florence you would be chaining yourself to the Cabinet Office Briefing Room railings in protest to the decisive muffling of the nursing contribution. Some will argue it is not the role of nurses.

Yet practical science is what we do and our patients and public need. We use the science skilfully and empathetically, translating it to provide care for those who are sick, dying and bereaved. This is what nursing embodies – so why aren't we an equal?

The professional 'system' is broken. Nurses are currently subservient in this pandemic. Somehow, somewhere, in all the excitement,

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providing highly skilled and technical care has been confused with subservience and perhaps hierarchy. Something you saw straight through Florence.

We have been 'done to' rather than embraced into the cohesive response to the biggest public health emergency this century.

Nursing as a profession feels it has gone back decades. How will we inspire future nurses to join our profession? What will our legacy be at this time of international collaboration and crisis?

Nursing on the front line has justly received the respect and support of its patients and the public – our message in this International Year

of the Nurse is that our contribution is far more than this.

Give us space on the coronavirus platform to lead with honesty and integrity.

Advocacy is key to effective nursing. You cannot advocate meekly.

So, like you Florence, we must question and if necessary, challenge directives and advice from Government that doesn't meet our needs or the needs of those we are caring for.

Every day nurses are trying to weave through the practicalities of nursing people with coronavirus,

largely guided by policies their profession hasn't been involved in creating.

Yes, we need scientists to understand the intricacies and ways this pathogen works, but we then need those creating guidance in London offices to 'walk in our shoes', to stand next to health care professionals as they do their job using commercial or makeshift PPE.

Put themselves in harm's way and feel the fear that many nurses feel. Experience the impact of words on paper. Without nursing boldly present at the table this is the only other way.

Happy Birthday Florence; I'll blow your candles out for you because I think you will agree, there is little to celebrate.