Welcome to a new column on the nursing profession. The goals of this column are to promote the profession of nursing and provide practical ideas and strategies to combat the nursing shortage. This is an incredibly hot topic that has recently been featured in *Reader’s Digest* (September & October 2003). The problem has reached epic proportions when it is now being addressed in America’s bathroom reading material. Can nurses make a difference with the current shortage? Attracting and retaining the best and brightest nurses to the profession were addressed in two articles in this journal (Albaugh, 2001 & 2003). With new information arising each day on this issue, the latest information on this topic will be discussed in this column regularly.

According to a recent Gallup Poll (Carroll, 2003), nursing is one of the most trusted professions. This indicates a positive perception of nursing as being honest and ethical. Nursing school enrollment has actually increased for 3 consecutive years after a previous 6-year decline (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2003). Could it be that the tides are slowly turning and a new interest in the profession is emerging? With unemployment on the rise and increased awareness of nursing and the shortage, there may be a renewed interest in the nursing profession, which offers a multitude of career opportunities. This is a trend in the right direction, but with much of the workforce expected to retire in the next 10 to 20 years, each nurse needs to continue to work with professional organizations to increase interest in nursing.

**Promoting a Positive Image**

There are many actions each nurse can take to improve the image of nursing and interest in the profession. Nurses can promote a positive image of nursing to the public with their professional attire, communication skills, demonstration of their complex scientific/sociocultural/psychological knowledge base, encouragement of other nurses and/or prospective students, and working with professional organizations in promoting a positive nursing image (Albaugh, 2001). In addition, nurses and professional organizations can continue to support legislation to improve financial access to nursing education. Nurses can work with employers to streamline paperwork and keep nurses at the bedside, determine and promote adequate staffing levels, participate in decision-making processes, and work towards achieving magnet status (Albaugh, 2003). American Nurses Credentialing Center’s Magnet status incorporates many of the concepts that draw nurses to a health care organization and keep them in the profession. Nurses can support and encourage legislation such as the Nurse Retention and Quality of Care Act introduced by Senator Hillary Clinton and incorporated into the Nurse Reinvestment Act. This federal measure provides grants to health care organizations to promote practices in institutions that promote and value nursing (Clinton, 2002). Many of these actions, along with involvement in nursing organizations such as SUNA, could make a difference in the perceptions of nursing as a profession and attract other individuals to the field.

There are no easy solutions to the nursing shortage, but if nurses work together with professional organizations, they can be influential in attracting and retaining nurses to this valuable caring profession. Nurses collectively represent an amazingly large body of individuals that could have a huge voice in mandating positive changes to promote nursing. Nursing as a profession is worth fighting for. This profession allows each nurse to personally glimpse the human journey from an intimate point of view. Each nurse-patient interaction holds within that relationship the power to transform the lives of the patient, family, community, and nurse. Most people strive all their lives to make a difference in the world. Nurses make that difference, one patient at a time.

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*Jeffrey A. Albaugh, MS, APRN, CUCNS, is a Clinical Nurse Specialist, Center for Urology, Northwestern Memorial Hospital, Chicago, IL.*

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