

To be of use

Nursing is a remarkable profession. It is among the most respected in society and one that touches the lives of practically everyone. Nurses are invited into people's lives at their most vulnerable moments. It is no wonder that people leave those encounters with a sense of what nurses do. However, like the proverbial elephant being described in a piecemeal fashion by a group of blind men, nursing is seldom understood in its totality.

The story of the elephant and the blind men often comes to me when I am asked questions like "Why does your school prepare nurses who are interested in research when we need nurses at the bedside?" Or, one of my favorites, "Why prepare nurses to be leaders, when you know they will be taken away from patients?" These questions serve as important reminders of why all of us need to take time to help those who clearly love our profession understand that for nurses to do what is most evident—expert caring—we need to focus on nursing's place in society and its contract.



Nursing is critical to the well-being of all people and to society at large. As a profession, we have a special responsibility to care for those we are paid to serve now. We also have the responsibility to work on behalf of those who are most vulnerable and to find better ways to provide services in the future. Our relevance and our future capacity to care rests with our developing knowledge to improve care and developing leaders whose service will advance humanity. These fundamental values rest in our social responsibility—developing and using knowledge to improve care and the overall well-being of society.

Those of you who know our school well also know our values: scholarship, leadership, and social responsibility. We see it as our responsibility to foster students who want to use their talents to inspire positive changes in the world. They work with underserved populations during school, and many continue doing so after graduation, such as our Fuld fellows. These incredible professionals came to nursing from other fields and saw the profession as an important way to make the world a better place, and they are doing just that! For example, Kelly Moynes Sklare, 04N, 06MN, works as a midwife to many uninsured patients at a hospital in Lawrenceville, Georgia. Laura Rainer, 05N, 06MN, 06PH, is working at the Fulton County (Georgia) Health Department. Jordan Bell Simcox, 05N, 06MN, is a family nurse practitioner, assisting refugees at a primary care practice in Ellenwood, Georgia.

This issue of *Emory Nursing* highlights other important, tangible ways in which our values are being lived out every day. You will learn also about how research is helping find ways to improve the outcomes of care. Dr. Lynn Sibley devised a program that teaches simple techniques to birth attendants in developing countries, like Ethiopia and Bangladesh, to improve birth outcomes. She's a tireless crusader for saving women's lives, but she's also an anthropologist who wanted to make sure any program she implemented respected the culture of the community in which she's working.

The theme of social responsibility in which nursing lives out its contract to improve health and well-being is evident throughout this issue, as are those dimensions of nursing that are bedrock to virtually everyone's understanding of our profession. Caring is at the core of our work. We will never abandon the bedside. We will, though, work tirelessly to ensure we reach more people and that we improve the ways in which we do our work. Our Alpha and Omega—the beginning and end reason for our being—rests in one simple phrase: "To be of use..."

Marla E. Salmon