

Dear Nurses,

In the spirit of this holiday season, I want to take this opportunity to thank you for your support and encouragement as I begin my term as the ninth Chief Nurse Officer, USPHS. I am truly humbled and honored by this distinction and in awe of the responsibility and stewardship the position of Chief Nurse symbolizes. I would like to reaffirm my gratitude and appreciation to you, the nurses, who have assisted in my ability to “stand” before you. I am especially grateful to VADM Regina Benjamin, Surgeon General, and Dr. Mary Wakefield, HRSA Administrator, for their leadership and support of nursing and health care for all.

A special tribute and honored salute to our distinguished former leader, Chief Nurse Officer, RADM Carol Romano. She is our champion. I humbly stand on her shoulders atop a strong foundation that RADM Romano, and the other seven Chiefs, built for us all to grow and reach our goals for a healthier, safer, stronger America. During the Change of Command Ceremony on 2 November 2009, RADM Romano transferred command literally and symbolically to me by passing a nursing lamp to guide me and to honor our past Chief Nurse Officers. We envision this ritual to become a tradition as the light of knowledge is passed on to the new Chief Nurse Officer every four years. The words that were read during this transfer are as follows:

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### ***Passage of the Nursing Lamp***

*The nursing lamp dates back to the work of Florence Nightingale, an English nurse and pioneer reformer, who made history during the Crimean War.*

*Because of her selfless duty, Nightingale became known as the “lady with the lamp”*

*She walked in the silence and darkness of the night with her lamp, to relieve human suffering, and bring the light of knowledge and caring to the injured victims of war.*

*She laid the foundations for the profession of nursing.*

*She understood the consequences of social, political, and economic factors on public health and she shaped policy.*

*Her legacy challenges all nurses to be the proactive conscience for the health of humanity.*

*The lamp is the ancient symbol of knowledge and learning. It represents the light of HOPE that nurses bring to the darkness of ignorance, illness, and disease.*

*Where there is HOPE, there is the fire of life.*

*Florence Nightingale lit her beacon of light to comfort the wounded.*

*The light of her lamp has blazed a path of service and knowledge across a century to nurses today.*

*Nurses inherit her social responsibility to transform the health of individuals, families, communities, environments and nations.*

*The Chief Nurse Officer of the U.S. Public Health Service serves as a voice and a leader for all nursing.*

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I owe much to the Federal civil service, Corps, and tribal nurses that have placed service, caring, and hope on the frontlines of their lives. To all the nurses who provide direct health care services to some of our most needy populations; the sick, homeless, isolated, uninsured, working poor, and vulnerable. To the nurses who provide the science for our evidence-based practice by conducting clinical research and epidemiological studies. To the nurses who educate the public and teach our next generation of health care providers. To the nurses who build systems of health care and the health infrastructure to advance and sustain our efforts. And, of course to the nurses who protect us from illness, disease, unsafe conditions, and provide relief during natural and man-made disasters.

As you all know, we have challenges as well as great opportunities ahead of us. My goals as Chief Nurse are to:

- Rekindle the nursing strategic planning efforts and continue to develop goals and objectives in line with our new Surgeon General, VADM Regina Benjamin;
- Include nurses in response to the emerging health needs of our populations as our nation is poised to enact health care reform;
- Focus on health workforce issues: increase the number of nurses and increase the number serving in underserved areas; (esp. IHS, BOP, Immigration Health, and isolated, hardship areas)
- Give *Voice to Science*: develop health programs and policies for nursing that integrate science, evidence-based practices, and social determinants of health to eliminate health disparities. This may be the first time in the history of our country that our children face the possibility of a shorter life span than their parents;
- Promote the *Intelligence of Prevention*: to counter such topics as:
  - o H1N1 pandemic flu and viruses,
  - o Obesity epidemic – over 60% of the adults in America are overweight or obese,
  - o High infant mortality rates – the U.S. ranks 27<sup>th</sup> in the world,
  - o HIV/AIDS epidemic,
  - o Mental health issues,
  - o Women's health issues and primary health care needs.
- Strengthen the Commissioned Corps and our partnerships with other organizations;
- Strengthen our *Skills of Protection*: emergency preparedness training and achieving Basic Readiness of the Corps Nurses to 100%; and
- Highlight international nursing and the value of health diplomacy.

Also, I wish to thank you for extending your wonderful welcome to me. The bouquet of Hawaiian flowers to honor my past was beautiful and the Angel of Hope, holding her lamp, sits above my desk shining the light of hope on all of us. I look forward to serving beside you and please know you can call on me.

I wish you and your family and friends a safe, healthy, and happy Thanksgiving Day.

All the best,

Kerry Paige Nesseler, R.N., M.S.  
Assistant Surgeon General  
Chief Nurse Officer, USPHS

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