WOC RESPONSE TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Editorial: Summon the Heroes

Mikel Gray

We live in an age when popular heroes wear masks and capes and use impossibly high-tech gadgets to save us from an apparent enemy, just before riding off into the proverbial sunset. We also live in an age when politicians, journalists, pundits, and countless cyber-commentators use superlatives or invective to inflate often trivial events such as who said what about whom, who is the biggest celebrity of the day, and who wields the greatest influence via social media. I have long worried that these trends in modern discourse are distorting reality, simplifying and trivializing complex threats that cannot be disposed of with the latest in technology, and replacing true heroism with celebrity status. As with much in life, I am both heartened and chastised to realize just how wrong I was!

The crisis precipitated by the stunningly rapid spread of COVID-19 and the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus (SARS-CoV) has directly affected 3 million people worldwide and is responsible for more than 200,000 deaths (a number that will undoubtedly increase between writing this editorial and you reading it). Though massive, even these numbers do not account for the true impact of this pandemic; I can say without irony or fear of exaggeration that the novel coronavirus, and the pandemic it has spawned, has irrevocably impacted every human being living on our planet.

The undeniable reality of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the demand for an effective response, has led to profound changes in daily life, including the demands of social distancing and avoidance of large (or even small) gatherings. It has profoundly affected the global economy, driving many important and ubiquitous industries, including travel and entertainment, to a virtual standstill. It has also strained supplies of the most common products such as groceries and cleaning products, while spurring an incredible increase in our use of other products such as apps for videoconferencing or live streaming as a replacement for face-to-face interactions.

Our response to the pandemic has also served as a stern reminder of the true nature of heroes and heroism. As popular fiction author Jodi Picoult observes in her novel *Second Glance*, true heroes have no superpowers; they bleed when they are cut, they bruise when struck, and their secret powers are as simple as listening, loving, and caring. Real-world heroes do not engage epic battles where evil is defeated or vanquished. Instead, heroes are those who engage in quiet and deliberate actions and commit acts of kindness and caring, knowing they are no more immune to the evil facing us than anyone else. Such heroic actions rarely lead to acclamation or praise, and they almost never lead to financial reward or celebrity status. Nevertheless, I have had the pleasure to observe and applaud

so much unexpected heroism in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in the most unlikely places. Examples are the check-out clerks at my local grocery store, the person who delivers takeout meals, and the attendants at the gas station who spend their day cleaning pump handles between every customer in an attempt to stop this seemingly unstoppable virus.

I also see and I call out *your* heroism when I observe the quiet dignity and determined actions of every member of the WOCN Society, every member of Nurses Specialized in Wound, Ostomy and Continence Canada, and every clinician who continues to deliver care to patients with chronic wounds, ostomies, urinary or fecal incontinence, and foot and nail problems. I see and I call out your heroism when I observe you preventing skin damage and pressure injuries in patients with SARS-CoV who require prolonged placement in the prone position. I call out your heroism when you quietly care for colleagues whose skin integrity is compromised due to their ongoing need to wear personal protective equipment. I see and call out your heroism as you provide emotional support and demonstrate human compassion to patients whose anxiety and fear are heightened by enforced absence from family and friends. I see and I call out your heroism as you scramble to provide telehealth services for community-dwelling patients with ongoing WOC care needs.

I also see and I call out your heroism as you give additional time to strengthen and support each other and our shared specialty practice. I see evidence of this quiet heroism as I read the helpful and insightful comments in the newest WOCN COVID-19 Forum. I see evidence of this dignified heroism as I observe WOCN Society volunteers producing best practice statements related to our role in delivering care to all our patients during the pandemic. I have personally observed and I call out the heroism of the editorial board members and authors of the Views From Here as they responded to my request to do "one more thing" and share their insights, wisdom, and clinical experiences in this issue of *JWOCN*.

Finally, I see and I call out your heroism as I observe your worried and loving faces as you take extraordinary precautions, make difficult decisions as you practice day to day while providing not one whit less effort to ensure the safety and protection of your immediate and extended families, and significant others.

I know that your uniform does not include a cape. I know that the mask you wear when caring for patients will not stop a speeding bullet. I know that your superpowers do not include special immunity from the novel coronavirus, or any pathogen for that matter. Nevertheless, I call out your heroism as loudly as I am able as I observe you continue to care for others knowing that you possess no truly superhuman powers, no special immunity from harm, and no high-tech gadgets that will vanquish this mindless, soulless, and truly evil virus.

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

DOI: 10.1097/WON.0000000000000668

Heroism is not conquering a mighty enemy; it is standing up and carrying on with grace and dignity when facing an invisible enemy that poses a very real threat to life and health. I see your heroism and I call you out for exhibiting real-world heroism on a daily basis.

When the pandemic began hitting the United States, I thought to myself, "Summon the heroes." Now that it is upon us, I finally realize, "They are already here!" The purpose of this editorial is to remind you that your actions are heroic, to call them out as such,

and to thank you for the quiet and dignified actions of courage you perform on a daily basis that will lead us through and beyond this global pandemic to a healthier and safer tomorrow.

—**Mikel Gray, PhD, RN, FNP, PNP,
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