



International Honor  
Society of Nursing

# THE PRESIDENT'S CHARGE



*Vernice Ferguson, RN, MA, FAAN, President of Sigma Theta Tau*

Last month, a news story appeared in the *New York Times* titled, "Americans Found Most Educated in the World." A Census Bureau study informed us that significant advances in schooling have made the American people the most educated in the world. In 1940, only 38% of those 25 to 29 years old had attained a high school diploma and a mere 6% had college degrees. Now, the census report said, 86% of those surveyed finished high school and 22% had college degrees. Those of us of Sigma Theta Tau have the competitive edge. We have always exceeded the norm.

The principal task awaiting us is to make the Center for Nursing Scholarship based here in Indianapolis a reality, in bricks and mortar and in services to people as we continue to progress with the Ten Year Plan. We have become a force for the generation and dissemination of knowledge as we provide leadership, leadership as scholars, leadership as pacesetters and leadership as standards boosters as nursing is practiced and our public served.

I charge us to develop the "savvy" so characteristic of Sigma Theta Tau through forums of instruction as we develop *Friends of Sigma Theta Tau* and acquire *Funds for Sigma Theta Tau* to erect a building and provide services to people who serve the public, primarily in health care. Note that I said *primarily* in health care. We of Sigma Theta Tau have never been known to define ourselves in narrow terms. I am convinced that some of the best leaders that exist are nurses. I would hope and surely envision that we can provide services to other organizations related to developing leadership skills and organizing scholarly seminars for example.

It is exceedingly clear that programs come to fruition and the public is best served when we mobilize our young members in diverse ways as they perfect their services to the public with excellence knowing that they have our enthusiastic support. While we will continue to provide leadership as we assure the enhancement of knowledge through an

elegant and elite cadre of productive and esteemed scholars, we will provide impetus to this new thrust. Therefore, I charge all of us assembled and those beyond who are members of Sigma Theta Tau to tip the scale in favor of the budding young researchers, clinicians, educators, administrators and entrepreneurs for they will provide scholarly leadership for the profession and health care in the years to come. For some, their future roles remain undiscovered while for some others the existing roles which they occupy, often unheralded, require our support. We must facilitate this recognition befitting the talents and committed service of nurses. I shall appoint the "Roaring 20" to serve as an advisory group to me as we focus on our young members as well as the community of young nurses who make or break nursing's image.

Yes, you can count on me to sustain the distinction that Sigma Theta Tau enjoys as we continue to lead the way as knowledge is generated and disseminated through exquisitely excellent scholars. I expect to provide leadership as we design and implement strategies to more quickly apply to our practice that knowledge which is known and

which should be utilized as we serve the public. We need to put aside the "no yield" results for we can not afford to waste the time, the talent and the money in such nonproductive pursuits. Concomitantly, we will develop mechanisms to assure that what is known as nurses practice becomes better known, better known to all nurses and better known to our many publics as we become and remain involved in an enlarged universe.

---

***"We of Sigma Theta Tau have never  
been known to define ourselves in  
narrow terms."***

---

Through faithful stewardship and a bit more, the breaking of new ground, I challenge Sigma Theta Tau to soar in our pursuit of excellence as scholarly leaders in those endeavors which have propelled us already into positions of pre-eminence in the international arena, mentoring endeavors and scholarly research. We need, however, to position ourselves in the minds and hearts of our many publics that we are a consistently potent, excellent, elegant, elite yet essential cadre of nurses who say it well, do it exquisitely, but most importantly, know it profoundly as we serve the public and provide leadership in scholarly endeavors for the profession and beyond.

Pre-eminence, scholarship, leadership, excellence, elegance are words that you will hear often. I encourage you to live through them as we continue to serve the public and inform them, while we remind ourselves, that Sigma Theta Tau is alive, well and thriving. With the input of the "Roaring 20" we will bring a new generation into focus befitting the bright future which belongs to all of us. ■





## KEYNOTE ADDRESS AT REGIONAL ASSEMBLIES 1986-1987

### *PATTERNS OF SUCCESS IN NURSING: ON BECOMING CULTURE BUILDERS*

Vernice Ferguson, R.N., M.A., F.A.A.N., F.R.C.N.  
*President, Sigma Theta Tau International*

#### INTRODUCTION

Yes, there exists a culture of nursing. Our public oftentimes respond to us based on their perceptions of and experiences with this culture as they encounter nurses and learn of nursing's work. Charles Horton Cooley, a sociologist of note said, "The imaginations people have of one another are the solid facts of society."

Presently, we are confronted with a major nursing shortage due to the inadequate number and quality of nurses for complex health care engagement and the declining enrollments of students. With other career options available many of the best and brightest are not choosing nursing as a career. It is disturbing to note that in less than a decade, by 1995 there will be 20% fewer young people entering the work force, compared to 1975. It is equally disturbing to note that nursing, social work and fields where altruism and social commitment are of high value, are not the preferred career choices of many of today's college freshmen. This further compounds the nursing dilemma as the public is served.

Perceptions abound, many of which are not in synchrony with reality. It seems to me that one of the major tasks which we ought to be about is building on the nursing culture as we work vigorously toward correcting misconceptions in this dynamic world of health care. It is regrettable that all too often an archaic rather than a contemporary view of nursing exists. Other health care disciplines appear to move forward in time, carrying a public perception of them that matches reality and is generally consonant with how they wish to be viewed. Somehow the nurses get left behind, their culture unknown or misunderstood as many publics conjure up a view of nurses and nursing often inaccurate and surely not to our liking.

It is our time and our business to assure that we are described accurately as we take our rightful place in the order of things as health care is planned for, delivered, evaluated, paid for and enhanced as nursing is practiced. The autonomy that is ours deserves recognition.

While in Hawaii for the Region I Assembly, I visited among the nurses at the Queen's Medical Center. In response to the questions – how do we enhance our practice?, how do we improve the attractiveness of nursing as a career choice?, one nurse suggested that we should focus on those who are succeeding rather than on those who are just making it or are failing. She stated that so much of our time, talent and energy are directed toward the latter. Herein lies a conflict for those in health care who are committed to helping others, the sick, the unfortunate, the downtrodden. Yet it is reasonable that we enhance nursing practice by striving for excellence.

Becoming and remaining influential culture builders is a deserved role for Sigma Theta Tau in this fast paced society and faster yet health care scene. We seem at our best when challenged. It was culture building when:

- Nurses, primarily nurse researchers and nurse political activists, mobilized efforts to make the National Center for Nursing Research at the National Institutes of Health a reality. They spent time describing and explaining the work of nursing to many publics. They brought information to support nursing's value to the public through previous scholarly research endeavors and cited the work yet to be done on the public's behalf. What will go on at the Center will in

a large measure depend on how our culture is perceived and its research efforts funded.

It will be nurses once again who will be called upon to engage in the resolution of the international nursing shortage with publics beyond nursing participating as:

- people are cared for now in today's health care system where competition for the nurse is quite keen
- long range remedies are sought and as
- the best and the brightest not only choose nursing as a career, but are favored as nursing continues to build on its culture.

And it will be nurses, under the leadership of Sigma Theta Tau, who will bring to fruition a Center for Nursing Scholarship in Indianapolis.

Quality concerns loom large in health care. Whether one is addressing quality of care or quality of life, quality issues permeate the health care scene. Members of honor societies such as Sigma Theta Tau are separated from the masses because they epitomize quality. This is our time as members of Sigma Theta Tau. It is our time to seize the initiative as we build on nursing's culture with excellence, a requirement first for survival and assuredly for viability in this new age.

#### CULTURE BUILDERS AND EXCELLENCE

Hickman and Silva's book, *Creating Excellence*, addresses executive success. Their book is a "how to" one for new age executives who find themselves in a crisis ridden era where quick fixes won't do. The authors remind us that strategic thinking and culture building become the strong foundation of excellence. They define culture as careful attention to organizational and people needs and strategy as the hardnosed American approach to business that traditionally stresses the impact of competitive advantage on the bottom line. To unite strategy with culture you first need to develop a vision of the firm's future and then in order to implement strategy for making that vision a reality, you need to nurture corporate culture that is motivated by and dedicated to the vision. Hence, vision is needed and skills required to actualize the vision.

Hickman and Silva are instructive to us of Sigma Theta Tau. First, they address excellence. Isn't that what we are about in Sigma Theta Tau? They address the need for a vision. Isn't that what the Ten Year Plan is about and what the concept of a Center for Nursing Scholarship with an International Library is about? Isn't that what is espoused in the purposes of Sigma Theta Tau as well?

We must become and remain culture builders. The corporate body of Sigma Theta Tau is its 110,000 members of whom 75,000 are active. We are a growing organization. We are growing at a time when our internal body of nursing, to which we all belong, requires attention, more participation of its members and surely more unity around the critical issues than is evident. We are growing at a time when the rate and nature of change in our larger world are often unpredictable and oftentimes chaotic. Consider health care alone. Who would have predicted ten years ago that there would be a revolution so sweeping? The advent of the prospective payment system for reimbursing health care and its myriad spin offs have affected all of us – as health care providers, recipients, holders of health insurance policies or those without and as concerned citizens. The system now forces us to

consider the most vulnerable among us as health care is rendered, rationed or denied and resources allocated if we would be humane. It forces us to be concerned as well about access, cost and quality.

Who would have predicted that within ten years we would witness a shortage of nurses for this nation's hospitals in a number of locations and a concomitant decline in enrollments of students primarily in generic nursing programs? After the halcyon days of the 60's when federal government support abounded for undergraduate and graduate nursing students, who would have suspected that so rapidly the federal government would change its direction, appetite and focus? The role of the federal government has been redefined and supported by a nation at the voting booth; tensions abound as strikingly different views of government are reconciled.

Yes, we are heartened by the reports of some Deans of Schools of Nursing who are administering larger masters and doctoral programs in nursing. This speaks to nursing's elegance and the hope for the future. The hope is that a bright and capable leadership cadre will emerge to position nursing well as scholarly clinicians, researchers, administrators, educators, entrepreneurs and policy makers take their places. Yet the gulf is widening between the "haves and have nots." The pipeline is drying up as many of the best and brightest are choosing careers in fields other than nursing. Lowered SAT scores are being reported as well as a double digit percent decline in students nationwide. In academic year 1983-1984 women represented almost 1/5 to 1/3 of students in nearly all health disciplines. In pharmacy and veterinary medicine, approximately 1/2 of all students were women. Then there is law, marketing, business and communications among the fields that beckon many of today's young.

Nurses remain the largest number of health care providers. More than 1.4 million nurses actively practice nursing. Fewer than 200,000, however, are members of the American Nurses' Association; by choice and by selection, 110,000 are members of Sigma Theta Tau.

It is against this background that the case is made for becoming culture builders. It is with knowledge of Sigma Theta Tau, its purposes and its "can do" spirit that permeates this international honor society which can serve as the catalyst for building the culture of nursing in an environment which is markedly different than any we have ever known. Ours is an environment that is filled with threats, yet opportunities, risks, yet successes, woe, yet joy - joy that comes from a successful performance and joy that comes from serving the public well.

### THE NEED FOR UNAMBIGUOUS ANSWERS

There are some questions to be answered. If ever a corporate culture is needed in nursing it is now! Some critical questions beg answers:

- Who is the professional nurse?
- What is that individual's title?
- What does the license represent?
- What educational preparation will form the base for that practice?

Presently, we are engaged in establishing the baccalaureate degree as the base for professional nursing. While we are engaging in this debate, other disciplines such as social work have established the masters degree as the base for professional practice, and pharmacy, the doctorate. Without the doctorate, clinical psychologists can't compete. Medicine, law and dentistry generally require the baccalaureate as a pre-professional degree. M.D., D.D.S., and J.D. became the first professional designations to practice in these fields, all of which are acquired in professional schools. And while we still engage in that

debate, some preparation at the masters or doctoral level the appropriate one for the generic preparation of the nurse? More questions require answers:

- What do professional nurses do?
- What outcomes, human and financial, do they effect?
- How do the many publics perceive nursing's contributions to health care? Are these services regarded as essential?
- Are they cost efficacious?  
Are they cost effective? Are they safe? Are they preferred?
- As we posture for our position in the health care arena, what have we agreed is the care that we will be held accountable for?

### THE VISION

Hickman and Silva remind us that in order to unite strategy with culture as excellence is created you first need to develop vision. What is a desired vision of nursing? The work of Dorothy Brooten demonstrates a desired vision. Dr. Brooten was Sigma Theta Tau's luncheon speaker at the 1985 NLN Convention. Her recent work will become my example of what is possible as we build our culture. Our commitment, competence and consistency which form the basis of a strong and successful culture are evident in Brooten's work and the subsequent letters to the editor.

The New England Journal of Medicine, has reported Dr. Brooten's clinical trial on early hospital discharge and home follow-up of very low birth weight infants. The study lists seven coauthors, two of whom are identified as MDs and three others as RNs holding the MSN degree. Dr. Brooten appears as first author. It is of interest to note that Priscilla Butts, former regional coordinator for Region VI is a coauthor. The results of this study were also aired on national television at the time of its appearance in print. Viewing it made one especially proud to be a nurse. This study was conducted to determine the safety, efficacy and cost savings of early hospital discharge of very low birth weight infants (~1500g). The researchers randomly assigned infants to one of two groups. Infants in the control group (N=40) were discharged according to routine nursing criteria which included a weight approximating 2200g. Those in the early discharge group (N=39) were discharged before they reached this weight if they met a standard set of conditions. For families of infants in the early discharge group, instruction, counseling, home visits and daily on call availability of a hospital based nurse specialist for 18 months were provided.

Study findings indicated that infants in the early discharge group were discharged a mean of 11 days earlier, weighed 200g less and were two weeks younger at discharge than the control group. The mean hospital charge for the early discharge groups was 27% less than for the control group, \$47,520 versus \$64,940, and the mean physician's charge was 22% less, \$5,933 versus \$7,649. The mean cost of the home follow-up care in the early discharge group was \$576, yielding a net saving of \$18,560 for each infant. The two groups did not differ in the numbers of rehospitalizations and acute care visits, or in measures of physical and mental growth. The researchers conclude that early discharge of very low birth weight infants with follow-up care in the home by a nurse specialist, is safe and cost effective.

I have chosen this example as one to suggest a vision as nursing's culture builds through the leadership of Sigma Theta Tau's members. Engaging in the conduct of clinical trials becomes our next major step as nurses enhance the scholarly base for practice. As we build our culture in order to serve the public consider what comes forth from Dr. Brooten's work:



- We form alliances with consumers of nursing's services and demonstrate that nursing's work makes a difference.
- We assure continuity of care through our constancy, accountability and availability.
- We teach health promoting behaviors as we foster the consumer's independence in managing his or her health and that of other family members.
- We bond with other nurses; we mentor some others as we bring them along in our research, practice, educational and/or administrative and political endeavors for it is by example and instruction that we socialize and professionalize nurses and nursing students to become culture builders.
- We seize the authority which is ours to practice nursing autonomously.
- We collaborate with colleagues in other disciplines as care to the public is provided through interdependent involvement.
- We assure that the public knows about our essential and cost effective care by writing, telling, selling and demonstrating this consistency, competence and commitment as we practice and as we continually question the current practice and improve it.

### SKILLS

Beyond vision as we build on the culture of nursing is the skill required to make our vision a reality. Some necessary skills in this new age become:

- The ability to prioritize, to order phenomena that we wish to affect as a corporate body. A useful aid becomes mastery of parliamentary procedure which includes learning and understanding the role of the chairperson as a corporate body effects its actions. For a group to be of maximum effectiveness, it must have competent leadership and also a high degree of competence among its members. Among other things this implies that the members know how to deliberate and how to crystallize these deliberations into group action. This also implies that the chairman knows how to inspire and direct group discussion and how to facilitate the crystallizing of this discussion into specific group action. Active participation in research helps to perfect this ability as well.
- The ability to communicate effectively, orally and in writing. Practice makes perfect. Participation in the affairs of Sigma Theta Tau become good grooming for perfecting this skill.
- The ability to negotiate, negotiate anything. It may be nursing's position in the health care arena and the political arena for example. In this new age confrontation and adversarial relationships give way to accommodation and win-lose to win-win outcomes.
- The ability to determine that we have performed well as we provide the public with an essential humanistic, effective and economically sound health care service. The testimony, which became a testimonial, when Dr. Brooten's research was aired on television showed a mother of one of the low birth weight babies and her child playing on the floor. The mother's words about nursing's presence and performance provided ample evidence that nurses had met the needs of the mother as she provided care to her child.

We need to assure as we develop alliances with those we serve and those who observe that service that we attend to its evaluation by checking back with the public. It is instructive and is essential as we serve the public creditably as accountable professionals. At this point in my career, I am staying in many hotels and having meals out across this country. I have been taking special notice of late of the questionnaires, often creative ones, which you as a guest or diner are asked to complete. On the cover of one questionnaire in a hotel room these words appeared, "Let us know how we did." Questions such as these awaited answers:

- How did you hear about us?
- Was our staff helpful, friendly and neat in appearance?
- On your next trip would you stay here again?
- Is there anything you would like to suggest would make your stay even better?

Think of the appropriate questions which consumers of nursing services should ask of us.

### CONSENSUS BUILDING which

Consensus building is an active process. It requires our attention as a critical new age skill in building nursing's culture. It is important to participate in decision making; being represented is not enough for it does not suit this new age. Taking positions is important. Permitting the minority opinion to be heard is essential. First, it is an expectation in a free society. Beyond that it may well reflect the cutting edge, the future direction. Consider some votes that counted. Just how important is one vote? *The Washington Post* on March 29, 1979, had a headline captioned, "Single Vote Ousts British Government." It was then that Mrs. Thatcher unseated Mr. Callahan as prime minister. Once again one vote made a difference in May of 1982 when by one vote Menachim Begin remained in power in Israel. We are reminded of some earlier close calls as well:

- In 1645, one vote gave Oliver Cromwell control of England.
- In 1640, one vote caused Charles I of England to be executed.
- In 1776, one vote gave America the English language instead of German.
- In 1845, one vote brought Texas into the Union.
- In 1923, one vote gave Adolf Hitler leadership of the Nazi party.
- And in 1941, one vote saved Selective Service, just 12 weeks before Pearl Harbor.

The scheme which I have developed and continue to use and refine in my leadership role encompasses three stages, each of which must be mastered before the next stage can be actualized effectively. These stages moving from the developmental phase to maturation are internal ordering, external bonding and the corporate trust.

Internal ordering and its achievement are critical to the viability of a group of individuals who seek a common identity and recognition as they ascribe to a set of beliefs, values and a predictable way of thinking and behaving. As a group becomes internally ordered, task force and committee activity are evident. Majority and minority opinions may be voiced as the art of debate is engaged and respect for different points of view of the group's members permeates the deliberations. The atmosphere may become highly charged as activity levels increase and a large amount of information surfaces. A tolerance for ambiguity, restlessness and even dissonance must characterize the leader as the group grapples with reaching consensus on the significant issues. Punitive action is destructive to the achievement of internal ordering.

Once the group has achieved internal ordering, winners and losers alike are expected to support the group's decision. To effect change once consensus has been reached entails group action and consent unless an accepted alternative has been agreed upon. The group must then consider the new information and endorse previous action, rescind or modify it or develop consensus anew. Censoring dissident group members once group agreement has been reached is in order. Open communications are critical to success. Supporting a group's decision as an active participant enables any member of the now homogeneous group to represent this group as external bonding is achieved in a group of unlike members who bond for a particular purpose. In such a heterogeneous group, each representative of a distinct discipline, organization, whatever, can be relied upon to espouse the group's position or bring its unique perspective which was

developed through the process of internal ordering to the deliberations. Succeeding in the process of internal ordering sets the stage for effective group functioning in a different environment with a different group of representatives.

Individuals who succeed over time and through repeated endeavors in a corporate body comprised of a group of individuals of varying disciplines and organizational identities have embraced the corporate trust. They achieve the goals of a superordinate body such as a corporate board of directors, trustees, regents, blue ribbon commissions, panels and task forces through a sustained relationship as they act on high level concerns and issues. The responsible behavior of a statesperson respected for a body of knowledge as well as style assures continuation in this role, often in multiple settings. Individuals who bring valued expert opinions and perspectives and effect positive interpersonal relationships succeed in this arena and are sought out. Those who are "well connected" and can assure goal achievement are sought as well.

Individuals and organizations that succeed in consensus building assure not only their survival but viability. Similarly, they are viewed with respect for their credible, responsive and responsible behavior.

### CORRELATES OF PARTICIPATION

A great deal of theoretical and empirical research has been conducted by behavioral scientists and organizational analysts that focuses upon participation by members of an organization in its affairs. The following three findings are particularly pertinent to us as we build a nursing culture:

- Clientele attraction and participation will tend to be greatest when there exists perceived personal agreement with group goals or policies.
- The greater the degree of participation by individual members in organizational affairs, the more similar will become their views and the policies advocated by the organization.
- The greater the visibility of benefits derived from organizational membership to the total clientele the larger the number of individuals who will join and/or participate in organization activities.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

Becoming culture builders creates a sense of community for it is the belonging to something, someone, some cause that gives purpose, meaning and direction to life. Creating and sustaining a community of nurses who value scholarship as essential to nursing is what we of Sigma Theta Tau are about. Dr. Brooten's recent research endeavor embodies that culture on which we must continue to build.

First, there must be a vision of Sigma Theta Tau's future and then the strategies to make that vision a reality. The corporate culture must be nurtured as it is motivated by and dedicated to the vision of a scholarly performance as the public is served by nurses. Commitment to this vision, competence demonstrated through excellence in performance and consistency that personifies the entire corporate culture assure success in nursing through Sigma Theta Tau, nursing's corporate culture builder.

## REFERENCES

### Books

Cooley, C., Human Nature and the Social Order, Schocken Books, New York, 1964

Hickman, C. and Silva, M. Creating Excellence, NAL, New York, 1984

March, J. and Simon, H., Organizations, Wiley, New York, 1958

Newcomb, T., The Acquaintance Process, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1963

Secord, P. and Backman, C., Social Psychology, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1964

### Articles and Monographs

Boswell, T., "Communication is the Key for Today's Manager, Baseball: A Changing Game" (Series), The Washington Post, May 22, 1986.

Brooten, D., Kumar, S., Brown, L., Butts, P., Finkler, S., Bakewell-Sachs, S., Gibbons, A., and Delivora-Papadopoluis, M., "A Randomized Clinical Trial of Early Hospital Discharge and Home Follow-up of Very-Low-Birth-Weight Infants." The New England Journal of Medicine, October 9, 1986, pp 934-939

Letters to the Editor: Brooten, et al., The New England Journal of Medicine, March 5, 1987, p 630

Etzioni, A., "Human Beings Are Not Easy to Change After All," Saturday Review of Literature, June 3, 1972, pp 45-47

Jones, O., Parliamentary Procedure at a Glance, Hawthorn, New York, 1971.

Projections of National Supply of Registered Nurses 1980-2000, Fifth Report to the President and Congress on the Status of Health Personnel in the US, March 1986.

The American Freshman: Twenty Year Trends, 1966-1985, Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA

The Registered Nurse Population, 1984, US Department of Health and Human Services, HSRA, Bureau of Health Professions, Division of Nursing