

Plaudits & Gripes

The Voice of Nursing Has to be Loud and Clear

Cathy Lesage

This past fall, the 14th World Congress of the International Federation of Gynaecology and Obstetrics (FIGO) was held in Montreal. Over ten thousand specialists in women's health gathered to share, disseminate, discuss and debate new research and ideas in this diverse and rapidly growing field.

Given that nursing is so closely connected with women's health, one would assume the voice and vision of nursing would have been loud and clear at this huge, multidisciplinary conference. Unfortunately, this was not the case. Despite the fact that much of the research was essentially nursing's domain, the nursing perspective was virtually non-existent.

This lack of contribution from the nursing profession was apparent in all areas, most notably in discussions concerning reproductive technologies. For instance, one paper focused on the attitudes of medical residents, medical students, and nurses towards new reproductive technologies. It was found that nurses experienced a much higher number of "consciousness conflicts" than did the medical students or residents when it came to using these technologies and were much less likely to perform morally disagreeable procedures on patients.

The physician presenting the data stated that nurses have difficulty with decisions surrounding the use of new reproductive technologies because "nurses don't think about these issues very much." This comment went unchallenged, a reflection of the lack of nursing representation at the conference.

Nurses are only too aware that the conditions of women's health are directly related to family and societal health. Nurses should not be timid about presenting their research at massive, primarily medical conferences such as FIGO. These are the conferences where global health care policies are conceived and deliberated. Both professionally and publicly, they offer an excellent opportunity to let the world know what is going on in nursing because these are the conferences which are covered by the media. They can help to give nursing a voice – a voice that is seldom heard over the onslaught of exciting new technologies and the roar of threatened physicians.

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