



2008 ENA Annual Conference

General Session

Yes, We Do!

“As an ENA member and a bedside nurse, I am so honored and humbled to be here today,” Cindy Lefton, RN, PhD, said as she delivered the September 26 General Session presentation at the 2008 ENA Annual Conference in Minneapolis.

During her “state of the union for emergency departments (EDs),” Lefton shared some national health statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention which showed there were 119.2 million ED visits in 2006, the year the data was collected.

“Every minute we have 227 people walking through ED doors across this country,” she said. “No wonder 40 percent of EDs in this country say they are dealing with crowding on a daily basis.”

In the last 10 years, ED visits have increased 24 to 36 percent, while the number of EDs decreased by 3,833.

“If you’ve been feeling tired lately at your job, it’s not because of your age—it’s because you’ve been working really, really hard,” she said.

Lefton pointed out that, at a time when 47.5 million Americans do not have health insurance, and another 25 million Americans between the ages of 19 and 64 are underinsured, the ED has become the safety net for the country’s entire health care system. “Do we keep stretching this safety net, or do we try to figure out the problem?” she asked. “It is a complicated problem, and there are no easy solutions. But, I believe that if we can figure out how to transplant hearts, kidneys and lungs, we can deal with crowding.”

Referring to a recent editorial by ENA 2008 President Denise King, RN, MSN, CEN, which challenged ENA members to reinvent the ED, Lefton outlined

a framework that played to emergency nurses’ strengths, including:

1. The courage to make a scary decision
2. The imagination to create an unexpected new world
3. The tenacity to stick with your vision
4. The resilience to persevere when things do not go your way
5. The heart to reach out to others and identify the rewards of leaving a legacy

The last strength was a direct reference to the work of Judith Kelleher and Anita Dorr, ENA’s co-founders. “It was Judith and Anita’s legacy, but any one of us could impact that legacy and carry it on,” said Lefton.

“The time has come for us to reinvent emergency nursing and emergency care, and you are a roomful of Thomas Edisons,” continued Lefton. “You know what needs to be done, what will not work, and you have the passion for our practice and know the needs of our EDs. It is far better that we figure this out than Congress, The Joint Commission or United Healthcare.”

Lefton referred to an ENA-sanctioned model of a healthy working environment from the American Association of Critical-Care Nurses, which contains six elements that can be applied as a framework to solve the problem of crowding. The most important element in the solution, though, is each individual member of ENA and how he or she behaves in the workplace. By practicing what Lefton called the Q4 ED behavior, exemplified by being both challenging and involving, asking questions and engaging other people for their opinions, emergency nurses can accomplish the six elements of a health work environment and solve the problem of crowding.



“We go to work every single day and face the unexpected—the Rhode Island nightclub fire, the Sioux City, Iowa, plane crash, the Alabama bridge collapse, 9/11—and every day we have people walking into our EDs with microbes, and we don’t know what they are, but no matter what it is, we handle it,” she said. “We stand strong every single day.”

Lefton closed with a message from the mother of a young boy named Derek who spent the last 12 hours of his life in the ED. “I want you to tell them that I am at peace, because the emergency department never deserted Derek,” Lefton quoted. “They were very busy that day, but the emergency department made us feel important, like we were the only ones there.”

“So we really do make a difference,” Lefton said. “Yes, we do. Yes, we do.”

From the November issue of the ENA newsletter, "Connections".