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# RE-BRANDING THE IMAGE OF NURSING IN NIGERIA: EVERY SECOND COUNTS

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## ABSTRACT

Nursing has changed considerably over the years. The image of nursing is formulated in many ways by the public, the media, inter-professional colleagues and nurses themselves. In nursing, image is the impression the nurse makes in the course of nurse-patient interaction. The image of nursing is vital to the profession, necessary in today's changing workplace, and an important concept for future nurses to understand.

Importantly, individual nurses in Nigeria have made a lot of effort to project their image but there is much to be done to collectively reposition the current image of nursing profession to where it ought to be when compared with its counterparts in other nations. Most of the times, nurses are not perceived in the manner they wish to be; their image appears to be blemished, as witnessed by the many negative messages in the media and the number of complaints about nurses received by employers or verbalized by the recipient of health care. Though efforts to improve on the image of Nigerian nurses (embrace of university education, research, and politics, providing quality care etc.) are ongoing and deserves commendation, the profession has not been accorded the prestigious place she deserves in the society. Hence, nursing professional image needs more, and we need it now. The time for nurses to re-define their image is now; nurses' actions, attires, methods of telling our story, of care delivery and of how they present themselves to the public are important in changing the image of nursing. By working together, nurses can help themselves and the public see the nursing profession clearly. Nurses should therefore take advantage of the university education, strive and lobby to be integrated into public policy development and decision making at all levels of health care organizations and in the government; conduct themselves positively and convey to the public that they are expert clinicians who recognize the value of caring, collaboration, health promotion, health education and provision of patient and family centered care and good communication skills. These opportunities allow nurses to represent the reality of nursing and to show how the profession contributes to health care. Re-branding the image of nursing in Nigeria is a top priority and the time is now; as a positive image would create a sense of pride and fulfillment in what nurses do and improve their worth to the very people for whom they care.

**KEY WORDS:** Re-branding Nursing image, professionalism, visibility and networking, degree in nursing.

## INTRODUCTION

Nursing is as old as human life itself (Kiwanuka, 2010). Nurses account for a significant proportion of the health care workforce in most countries. Waters (2005) in Meiring and Van Wyk (2010) believes that nurses are the backbone of the healthcare sector and are fundamental in the delivery of quality care for all the inhabitants of a country. In the African continent, it is estimated that nurses constitute about 80% of the health care professionals (Asuquo, Etowa, John, Ndiok, Sampson-Akpan and Olaide, 2013).

Image is part of a profession. Importantly, the image a profession reflects is never in isolation to that which the public hold about them (Cunningham, 1999 in Takase, 2005) and this is why the public image of nursing has been described as an important barometer of the profession's value to society (Malchau, 2007). The image of nursing is vital to the profession, necessary in today's changing workplace, and an important concept for future nurses to understand (American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN), 2010).

According to the Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2008) an image is a "mental picture of something or somebody." In this paper "image" refers to the mental picture that the public has of nurses and the nursing profession. Public beliefs and images of nursing/nurses may determine the values of nursing, the way nursing services are utilized and maintained, resources nurses can access, and the degree of power and authority they can exercise.

Nursing and nursing's image have undergone dramatic changes throughout history, including the time of Florence Nightingale, which leads to the question:

Who is the real nurse of today? (Hargate, 2015). The image of both nurses and nursing has been the focus of a number of researchers globally and seem to be the concern of writers way back from the 1970s and till date. However, there has been little or no paradigm shift from how nursing is been perceived and portrayed by society and media.

Despite the great advances in the nursing profession, nurses still face considerable challenges as regards its image and this impact on her status, power and the ability to effect changes in health care. According to Malchau (2007), these images constitute part of the public discourse and are influenced by the information that the public receives both through its interaction with nurses and from media portrayals of nurses and nursing. According to Kalisch (2006), a negative image of nursing has a number of negative consequences; for example, it has impact on the quality and quantity of persons who choose nursing as a profession. The public who are constantly presented with an inaccurate and negative nursing image will view a career in nursing as undesirable. This is especially relevant to the recruitment of men in the field where media portrayals have focused primarily on women while the image of a male nurse is often negative.

However, nurses must realize that they themselves play a part in forming the image of nursing on a daily basis and each second. Nurses build the public image of nursing profession through day-to-day interactions with patients, families and colleagues hence, every second available to a nurse counts in development of the profession's image. Each nurse, no matter the specialty/office of practice, forms the image of nursing profession each second

of the day. Every time a nurse says to a family, friends, or in public that he or she is a nurse, the nurse is representing the profession. The image of nurses in the real world is established by nurses 'on the floor'. Not everybody watches television on a regular basis but the writers defy anyone to say they have never been a patient or visited anyone in hospital. This is why nurses need to be so concerned about their public image.

Buresh and Gordon (2000) stated, "We cannot expect outsiders to be guardians of our visibility and access to public media and health policy arenas". Both the public and the media consider the responsibility for changing the image of nursing to be in the hands of the nurses themselves (Meiring and Van Wyk, 2013). A study by Maeve and Dian(2011)carried out in USA reported that greater influence on public perception about nursing was "...personal experiences with nurses as a patient or family member" as nurses were described as highly valued and caring professionals; as such people will recommend their children to go into the nursing profession. Interestingly, 66% reported that the negative media images of nurses did not influence their opinion. With such information, what then should nurses do to right the wrongs done to nursing's image? It is imperative that nurses, especially Nigerian nurses, evaluate the image that they portray every second and use this information to re-brand the profession as a knowledge-based, gender-equal and status-imposing career among other careers.

### **Any need to worry about the nursing image?**

Nursing has changed considerably over the last fifty years. Developments in technology, shifting community demographics, the move to university

education and the emergence of new allied health roles have all contributed to the constantly evolving roles of nurses in society. Despite the giant strides and contribution of the nursing profession to the public, the writers observe with dismay that nursing in Nigeria has not been accorded her prestigious place she deserves in the society. Unfortunately, public perception has not kept pace with the contemporary reality of nursing. According to Cohen and Bartholomew (2008), most times, nurses are not perceived in the manner they wish to be. Their image appears to be blemished, as witnessed by the many negative messages in the media and the number of complaints about nurses from patients and general public.

Nurses have been portrayed in countless different ways—from angelic, altruistic figures who volunteer their time to help people in need, to hyper-sexualized, uneducated people who focus solely on serving doctors. The media has had a huge influence on society's view about the nursing profession, and because of this skewed portrayal, those who work in the nursing field have been negatively impacted. Also, there is a threat to our cooperate existence as a profession. O'Neill (2000) proposed that unless nursing is viewed as a substantive scientific discipline, today's intelligent young people, who could solve some of nursing's long-standing problems, will not be attracted to enter the profession. Just like individuals may feel depressed or less effective if others view them negatively, professionals including nurses can experience similar reactions if their image is not positive. It is against this backdrop that this paper focuses on re-branding the images of nursing, while highlighting the

challenges and prospects of improving nursing image in Nigeria.

### **Trends about the Image of Nursing**

Before the mid-1800s, nursing was without organization, education or social status. The prevailing attitude was that a woman's place was in the home and that no respectable woman should have a career outside the home (Kozier and Berman, 2008). Nurses in that era were poorly educated, some were even incarcerated criminals. Dickens (1986) in his book reflects nurses using the character of Sairy Gamp who cared for the sick by neglecting, physically abusing and stealing from them (Donahue, 1996 In Kozier, et. al., 2008).

Subsequently, the 'guardian angel/angel of mercy' nursing image arose in the latter part of 19th century majorly because of the work of Florence Nightingale during the Crimean war. In that era, nurses were viewed as noble, compassionate, moral, religious, dedicated and self-sacrificing.

In the latter part of the 19th century, the image of nursing as the "doctor's handmaiden" emerged. This was due to the prevalent paternalistic family structure in that era, where medicine was viewed as the male profession and more of the males dominated the profession. In addition, women were yet to obtain the right to vote and the medical profession at that time portrayed an increasing use of scientific knowledge. This era had great influence on the profession especially in Nigeria. The nurses in that era were trained by the doctors, and nursing was completely governed by medicine.

In contemporary times, image of nurses as perceived by the public vary globally. Studies on public perceptions of contemporary image of nurses and nursing profession have been conducted in the

United Kingdom (Hancock, 2000), in the USA (Dombeck, 2003), Canada (Fletcher, 2007), and in Australia (Johnson & Bowman, 1997).

In the USA, nurses have been voted three consecutive times as the most trusted health professionals. A poll by Vanderbilt University showed that 95% of Americans trust, respect, and admire nurses (American Academy of Nursing (AAN), 2007).

In South Africa, though the image of nursing seemed to be negative, based on media reports that nurses neglected their patients and that many nursing vacancies existed as a result of poor salaries and of poor working conditions (Kahn, 2008), a recent study by Meiring and Van Wyk (2013) revealed a contrary result which showed a generally positive public view of nurses and nursing by the South African public, though nursing was not viewed as a career choice for their children. Nevertheless, a positive image of nurses is reflected in the number of applications received by nursing schools, colleges and universities for nursing training.

In Nigeria, nurses have not taken the lead in standing up and discussing the image of nursing: what it is and what it is not. Few studies related to the perception of patient and health workers/nurses (Mohammed and Odetola, 2014; Oyetunde, Ononaiwu and Oyediran, 2014) are available with little emphasis on the image of the nurse or nursing profession by the public.

Generally speaking, to the Nigerian public, anybody in white-wearing-apparel with white caps anywhere in the street must be a nurse. The public perceive a nurse as handmaidens to physicians, someone with little or no medical knowledge who assists the doctor during and after treatment of illnesses, surrendering their chairs to physicians, assisting the patient in keeping

up his personal hygiene in a very wicked, naughty and rude manner, giving the medications as prescribed by the doctor, and dressing the wounds when there is a need.

There are also people in some quarters who are of the view that men have no business working in the field of nursing due to lack of capacity to care compared to women. As such, men in nursing are often presumed to be physicians or asked why they did not go to medical school instead; as if it is not appropriate or socially acceptable to have chosen nursing. Why then does it seem that these trends of poor image perception by the public persist? Are nurses not bothered? Are those characteristics truly what the nurse and nursing Nigeria represents?

In Nigeria, individual nurses have made a lot of effort to project a positive image but much more need to be done to collectively reposition the current image of nursing profession to where it ought to be when compared with its counterparts in other countries, especially the developed countries.

An important factor that has greatly influenced the poor image of nurses is poor perception of role by nurses themselves. Nurses' professional role ranges from being a care coordinator, teacher, patient advocate, a researcher to providing direct quality care, promoting patient health and safety, just to mention a few. Nurses seem not to understand the role expectation the profession and the public holds of them, a situation that has resulted in some nurses falling short of their role expectation. Sadly, most of the nurses still address patients by the disease condition, abuse patients and patient relatives and worse still have indulged in

shifting of task to patient relatives. Nurses have majored on the minor and minored on the major, they spend most of their time discussing personal issues in the workplace while patients are in great need of information, support and care from a professional.

Secondly, most nurses have a poor self-image of themselves. The self-image of the nurse implies how nurses feel about themselves and this is what they bring into their daily practice thus correlating in how they are perceived as a profession, whether by physicians, the public or prospective nurses. If nurses feel good about who they are and what they do, nurses will end up communicating that feeling to others both verbally and nonverbally". Fletcher (2007) supports this viewpoint by stating that the self-image of the nurse drives the social value of nursing and that, if nurses were able to enhance their self-images, then the image of the entire profession may improve. Most nurses see themselves and what they do as "second class" and believe that anything can go. They end up accepting the viewpoint of other health professionals, patients and patient relatives even when these viewpoints does not reflect what they stand for and impinge on their self-worth.

Poor communication of nursing philosophy among nurses and even to the public is another area of concern that has greatly impacted the image of nursing profession. Everyone has a philosophy, whether they are aware of it or not. Philosophy is important because it is "a natural extension of our interest in truth" (Scruton, 2005 in Meehan, 2015). Philosophy of nursing states our thoughts on what we believe to be true about the nature of the profession of nursing and provide a basis for nursing activities. What

we think is true about nursing is what brings most of us to our practice each day. It encompasses our values and ethical principles. It helps clarify for nurses who they are, who their patients are, what they are doing and why they are doing it. The philosophy of nursing is based on compassion, care, respect and dignity for human and more importantly assisting individuals to gain independence through open and interpersonal relationship. The challenge here is that most nurses do not consciously imbibe the core values and ethical principles of the profession. The nursing profession in Nigeria and most institutions have paid little attention to communicating to her nursing workforce and even the public what they stand for and those philosophies that guide nursing practice. Nursing can change when we consciously connect values and beliefs to nursing situations considering that values and beliefs are the basis for our nursing practice.

Most nurses demonstrate a weak knowledge base when compared to their counterparts in the health sector. The nurse performs varying functions in the ever evolving health care setting which range from health promotion, health restoration, illness prevention and suffering alleviation. Therefore, the nurse is expected to be proactive, vibrant, highly intelligent and knowledgeable, conveying correct and up to date information about nursing and health care. Majority of Nigerian nurses are not readers, they are only comfortable with caring and practicing according to status quo, a reason why there has been little innovations from the nursing end and her relevance has been questioned in the health sector.

Infiltration of quacks into the nursing profession resulting from failure of the

profession to define who the nurse is, is the most challenging factor affecting the image of nursing in Nigeria. Most of the private hospitals have a greater percentage of their workforce as auxiliary or health assistance (fondly called “Eliza nurse”) and community health extension workers who have been wrongly labeled as “nurses”. These set of people are not trained by nurses nor is their training standard regulated by nursing professional body hence they do not have the values and ethics unique to the nursing profession. Sadly, they are the ones that the public refer to as nurses; they dress in white apparel, carry out doctor’s orders and communicate poorly with patients and patient’s relatives. Recently, a private hospital in Lagos State, Nigeria called for advert for the position of a “CHEW NURSE”. How then do the public differentiate these set of people from the professional nurse? The Nursing and Midwifery Council of Nigeria needs to come out clear and define who the nurse is and set up policies that delineate role expectations for her workforce ensuring that no healthcare institution functions without a professional nurse supervising these health assistants.

The appearance and public conduct of some nurses make the members of the society question the fact that nursing is noble profession. Manners, posture, attitude, clothing etc. are all forms of non-verbal communication that produce judgments, opinions and behavioral response in the clients. The appearance is often the first impression a patient and the public gets of the nurse. It gives a patient an impression and sets the stage for further interactions. Most nurses are seen in their uniform at market places, eating while walking on the street or in public transport,



their hair looking unkempt and worse still with slippers. Nurses ought to be smartly dressed, gorgeously looking and conscious of their conduct even within and outside the hospital environment. Appearance can either enhance or reduce the confidence patients, families and colleagues have in the nurse as it conveys professional competency (Hall and Ritchie, 2009).

### **Nursing Image and the Media Industry**

The role the media industry plays in portraying the image of nursing is very significant and is never to be underestimated. The media has the ability to influence public opinion of various people and things, including the nursing profession (Hill and Ritchie, 2009). Hence, it is important that nurses' roles and contributions to health care are accurately represented. There are two sides to this situation; it is either the media presents nurses and the nursing profession wrongly or that the media actually is presenting the public views about nurses.

To buttress this fact, Sherman (2000) conducted a study of 1,800 students in grades 2-10 who were interviewed face-to-face. The students reported they received their main impression of nursing from "media." The students said they believed that nursing is a "girl's job", that it was a technical job "like shop", and that it was an inappropriate career choice for private school students, of whom more was expected. In contrast, a journalist, Suzanne Gordon, who has written a lot about nursing profession noted that often it is the media that is accused of representing nursing poorly, when in reality, the media is reflecting the public image of nursing (Buresh and Gordon, 2006). More often than not, negative stories about nurses

reach the papers whilst positive ones are rarely published.

The foundation of nursing profession with a strongly defined knowledge is not been addressed by the media and consequently, young people in general tend not to consider nursing as their ideal career choice. As submitted by Buresh and Gordon (2000) in Benner (2005), nurses must therefore develop the skills of presenting the profession in the media and take the responsibility for moving from silence to voice. It is also significant to the future of nursing that nurses safeguard nursing public image in local newspapers, television, media dramas, and more importantly our daily practice. The Nursing and Midwifery council through their advertising/ICT department should initiate a media talk show or forum where profiles and press releases about nursing is discussed. They should engage in marketing and showcasing nursing using the media, especially in paper writing and dissemination of information about the paper. Nurses should employ a grass root approach by getting involved in hometown affairs, reaching out to local reporters who cover health care issues by offering tips on healthcare trends and acting as an expert source. They should determine how and what is communicated about nursing in the media. The use of nurses' week should be maximized such that nurses who are outstanding in practice, education, education and/or politics are showcased, recognized and celebrated.

### **Re-branding the image of Nursing: Implication for Nursing Profession in Nigeria**

Improving and maintaining the image of the nursing profession, as well as the image of nurses themselves, is crucial to the future of nursing profession in keeping

with demand for nursing services as the population grows. Improving the image of nursing will also motivate the existing workforce towards quality care delivery which will lead to consumer and job satisfaction for the patient and the nurse respectively. This will influence the respect for and public recognition of the importance of nurses in our health system; hence the values of nursing, the way nursing services are utilized and maintained, resources nurses can access, and the degree of power and authority they can exercise will substantially improve. Furthermore, it will impact policy making and nursing care outcomes. Specifically, nursing profession in Nigeria need to address the following:

First, is the issue of nursing education and professional development. Valuing education is one of the hallmarks of a profession. The way nurses were trained in the 80's and 90's can no longer hold sway in this era of technology burst and knowledge expansion. The expectation of the public of the nurse is one that requires all nurses to have a minimum of university degree and continually develop professionally. Professional liberation occurs due to much dive into educational empowerment for her populace. As nursing education continuously evolves to meet the ever changing health needs of patients, nurses should identify their skill, practice and knowledge deficits and embrace the changing education especially the university higher degree program to stay abreast with the demand of quality health care by the populace.

Just as other Nursing Councils in the Western countries have done, Nursing and Midwifery council of Nigeria (NMCN), the professional body saddled with the responsibility of regulating nursing

education and practice must as a matter of necessity define who the professional nurse in Nigeria is. Minimum entry point, requirement and professional qualification upon graduation must be defined and made uniform for all, they should determine the core competencies and character traits that a nurse must portray, and also redefine nursing role which has been poorly perceived and wrongly conceptualized by both nurses and the public. To address future nursing professional image, nursing education must develop or adopt existing models like Strasen's self-image model which provides an insight on ways to break the cycle of negative behavior of nurses in portraying their profession thus adding value to the process of creating a new image. In addition, it is believed that majority of the nurse managers, leaders and administrators have contributed to delay in the longstanding strive towards advancing nursing education. They have not taken the bold step to pursue higher degrees in nursing and have directly or indirectly opposed any reform that supports higher education for nurses. They have also denied their subordinates the privilege of pursuing higher degrees in nursing and frustrated the efforts of those who insist on advancing professionally. If nursing professional prestige is what to go by, nursing leaders should subscribe to professional development especially higher education degree in nursing and allow subordinate to take advantage of this development for the improvement of the image of the profession.

Second, is the way nursing is being practiced in the clinical setting which has greatly impacted on the image of nurses in Nigeria. The need to integrate evidence based practice in nursing services cannot be overemphasized. Nursing services

should no longer be practiced intuitively nor based on how it has been done before; rather, practice should be based on best available evidence. All nurses must embrace research, bridge the theory-practice gap and ensure quality in the delivery of care to her customers. Nursing profession must ensure regulation to nationally consistent standards and capacity in practice, education and research. This can only occur when nurses actively engage in any of the phases in the research-utilization continuum. Nursing profession must strive and lobby to be integrated into public policy development and decision making at all levels of health care organizations and government. Also, Nurses' conduct and carriage in the course of patient care goes a long way to form the image of the profession. To build a positive image nurses should conduct themselves positively and convey to the public that they are expert clinicians who recognize the value of caring, collaboration, health promotion, health education and provision of patient and family centered care; treating people with courtesy and respect, body language – good posture, appropriate vocabulary – and good communication skills.

Advocacy in nursing stems from a philosophy of nursing in which nursing practice is the support of an individual to promote his/her own wellbeing as understood by that individual. Advocacy projects the nurse as the care coordinator and closest partner to the patient thus, projecting a very positive image of the nursing profession. In countries where this has been achieved, the nursing profession does not struggle with image projection as the nurse has been declared the most trusted health care professional.

The place of mentorship and preceptorship in re-branding the image of nursing has long been neglected. Mentors are competent, experienced professionals who develop a relationship with a novice for the purpose of providing advice, support, information and feedback in order to encourage the development of the individual. Mentors and preceptors serve as role models, transforming the novice into becoming a full fledged competent professional. Nurses' attitude towards the practice of nursing has been a major issue mostly in Nigeria. To address this, nurses need to be re-oriented (brain washed) on what nursing really is and does. This can be achieved through role playing, mentoring and preceptor-ship, seminars, workshop, penalizing the defaulters and applauding exceptional commitments etc. The approval of internship for the graduate nurse would serve an excellent pedestal for modeling the nurse.

**An aspect that affects nursing image in Nigeria that requires policy intervention is the female dominance in the profession.** Other health professionals have always taking advantage of the female dominance in nursing and have oppressed them, depriving nursing of key areas in politics and decision making. Although the number of men in nursing is growing, more campaigns and targeted recruitments to draw men into the profession is needed. As more men enter the profession, they will become role models and mentors for others and other men will look at nursing as they do other career options. The above discourse has implication for recruitment and retention of intelligent and vibrant youths into the profession. The persistence of outdated images, stereotypes and negative perceptions have affected recruitment and

retention of nurses, which remains a concern to health bureaucrats worldwide and in Nigeria especially. People enter and stay in a profession if they feel respected, and think that the profession carries prestige. The image of both nurses and nursing profession are vital in the recruitment and retention of staff, a fundamental requirement for the delivery of quality nursing care. Improving the image of nursing and finding ways to encourage young males to enter the nursing field are two areas that need attention from nurse executives.

Another aspect that hopes to place nurses at an important power strategy and politically relevant position is visibility and networking. All nurses irrespective of their work setting needs to make her/himself visible in all aspects, hence promoting professional visibility and pride. Key area by which nurses can become visible is through advanced education, research innovations, publications and the use of media to the advantage of nursing profession and the nurse, the lack of which has been reported to affect visibility in nursing (Avila, da Silveira, Lunardi, Fernandes, Mancia, et. al., 2013). Of course, no one knows nursing as much as nurses do. So nurses should create their own media, to explain nursing to the world. Upon successful visibility, nurses can move steps further to networking with key players both internationally and nationally in the arena of politics, education and health care practice. A network is a system of contacts that are developed, nurtured and maintained as sources of information, advice and moral support. As nurses develop professional networking, they are empowered through interaction and their interpersonal skills are refined. Nursing

professional organizations (e.g. NANNM etc.) are an important tool for effective networking and these medium should be redefined and positioned to represent a vibrant voice for change.

The individual nurse has a significant role to play in redefining nursing image in Nigeria. Reconciling ones philosophy and the philosophy of professional nursing is indicative of the nurse projecting a positive self-image. Nurses should strike a balance between their true self and the image of a professional nurse as they think of themselves as powerful and effective. Creating a positive image requires one simple action; nurses have to believe in nursing, in who nurses are, and in what nurses do. Having a career commitment implies that the nurse views him/herself, first and foremost, as a member of the discipline of nursing with an obligation to make contribution to the profession. Hence, nurses should buy and sell the nursing as good sales representative to the public who demand the services. Package you and your services well on presentation before your customers.

The importance of well-groomed hair and face, neat and clean clothing and appearance has always been emphasized by nurse leaders. In agreement to that, the writers call on nurses to remember that dressing alone does not make one a professional rather, it is the care provided with honesty and competence that makes the difference. Effective communication is an essential element of nursing practice as a huge percentage of the time of nurses' working hours is spent on communication. The average nurse has been criticized of not having a good command of English language and poor communication skills. Whether it is verbal or non-verbal, when communicating the patient should feel

respected and be involved, encouraged and at ease to ask questions for clarification. Good communication is a means to build relationship with the clients and other health professionals which is expedient for formation of the nursing image.

As health care becomes increasingly complex, just like Martin Luther king Jnr., the writers envisions a Nigerian nursing where all the nurses will value nursing and image it daily; embrace educational empowerment to keep abreast with the challenges of evolving healthcare delivery; take themselves seriously and dress the part; be highly visible to patients, families and other healthcare professionals because they have reclaimed their birthright and practice; especially where negative comments about a colleague are made to the colleague and to no one else, where the nurse recognizes that the active membership to the professional associations and politics is a key to moving the nursing profession forward. In this new world of nursing, the Nigerian nurse will believe in nursing, in self and in their colleagues. Re-branding the image of nursing in Nigeria is a top priority and the time is now as a positive image would create a sense of pride and fulfillment in what nurses do and improve their worth to the very people for whom they care.

## **CONCLUSION**

Nursing's general philosophy is about helping others. It is not just about a degree or a licensure, it is about the image of an individual that is compassionate, displays accountability and above all, is professional in manner. Cohen (2007) posits that caring is the essential part of nursing and patients are at the forefront of this care. Nurses need to convey that they are experts in caring and that patients can

trust their lives in the hands of the nurse. The public wants a professional, dedicated, committed and knowledgeable nurse. In order to match this image, nurses have to pull up their socks; be motivated and have positive self-esteem. Nurses must be proud to offer the service they have chosen to provide.

Nurses need to be proactive in influencing public image of the profession. It is up to the profession (made up of nurses) to influence perceptions and educate the public about what nurses actually do. To improve their public image and to obtain a stronger position in healthcare organizations, nurses need to increase their visibility. This could be realized by ongoing education and a challenging work environment that encourages nurses to stand up for themselves. Furthermore, nurses should make better use of strategic positions, such as case manager, nurse educator or clinical nurse specialist and also use their professionalism to show the public what their work really entails.

Nurses should double effort in embracing evidence-based practice, research, professional development and higher degree education, mentorship, preceptorship, inter-professional communication skills etc. to promote the professional image of nursing. In order to attract more individuals to the profession, a positive image of nursing needs to be engendered by nurse education and the general community.

For the nurse, every second counts in improving the image of nursing profession since the image every nurse creates (builds) each day contributes to the overall image of the profession. Therefore, it is imperative that the nurse utilizes every second to building a positive image of

her/himself and the profession. The image of nursing has changed for the good over the years, and will continue to change when nurses stand up and insist on better representation, and that will only happen when nurses' self-worth improves.

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