

# Thirtieth Biennial Conference of the Caribbean Nurses Organisation

*Pamela Shaw reports from Antigua and Barbuda on the 30th Biennial Conference of the Caribbean Nurses Organisation, celebrating the innovative work undertaken by nurses in leading and delivering evidence-based health care.*

It was a pleasure to be invited to present at my second nursing conference in the Caribbean, a year after my initial presentation in Trinidad in 2015.

My invitation in October was to the beautiful island of Antigua and Barbuda. The 30th Biennial Conference of the Caribbean Nurses Organisation (CNO) was held at the Grand Royal Beach Resort. The conference theme was 'Nurses and Midwives: Pioneers in Health Care'—a fitting title highlighting the innovative role undertaken by nurses in leading and delivering evidence-based care. Attendees came from 20 islands across the Caribbean, north America and Europe, and provided like-minded people with the opportunity to increase knowledge, share best practice, network and have fun. It also enabled attendees to experience the wonderful culture of Antigua and receive hospitality from the host island.

Attendees were privileged to celebrate the conference with support from the Governor-General, His Excellency Sir Rodney Williams. This was extended to a cocktail event in the grounds of his stately home. He welcomed the nurses and midwives warmly, and congratulated the nursing association for attracting



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*The 30th Biennial Conference of the Caribbean Nurses Organisation was held in Antigua and Barbuda*

such a global prestigious educational event. The conference had additional features that enabled attendees to combine learning and networking with fun and entertainment. One of the events included a cultural evening, where each island shared its culture, traditional dishes, norms, history and traditional costumes, all injected with a sense of humour and learning.

## How nurses can lead change to transform services

The conference covered a range of topics, with a focus on nurses providing effective care with measurable outcomes. Emphasis was placed on the challenges of providing complex health-care services with

reduced funds. The drive was how we can make the best of what we have in preparing nurses now and in the future with the necessary knowledge and skills to manage these challenges, while ensuring high-quality care that is cost-effective, timely and patient-focused.

There were many examples provided by presenters on how they managed challenges in their professional field, which touched on clinical, educational, research and management. All highlighted how they were not afraid to do things differently and grasp opportunities to improve health outcomes for patients, communities and populations.

It was acknowledged by attendees that nurses have made, and continue

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to make, a real difference to patient care through research, education, clinical practice and having the courage to be a transformational leader in their sphere of practice. This means not being afraid to lead on new programmes and care packages; being an advocate for patients; instigating research; observing trends; and working with key organisations to improve the delivery of services.

The conference emphasised the importance of a nurturing environment that enables nurses to reach their full potential and lead from the front on all levels, from the bedside to the boardroom. For this to happen requires nurses to demonstrate the right attitudes and behaviours, and know their limitations and when to access support through mentoring, coaching and clinical supervision. Enabling personal resilience-building and harnessing a caring culture towards colleagues will, ultimately, lead to better care for patients.

### Joined-up working

My presentation focused on joined-up working between health visitors and midwives, and how this can promote positive outcomes of pregnancy and infancy. I have worked in both roles as a dual registrant, and respect the importance of effective communication between midwives and health visitors. I emphasised health visitors and midwives having

the courage to lead and be proactive in promoting health and shaping services. This can only be done by actively contributing to policies, ensuring practice is research-based, maintaining continuous professional development, always sharing best practice through good collaboration, and having an understanding of managing change with limited resources without compromising care. I explained that, to ensure best outcomes for families, collaborative working between professionals is essential so that interventions can be offered at the earliest onset to reduce any negative impacts and improve positive outcomes.

I described the *Healthy Child Programme* and the role of health visitors in leading the programme that is designed to be a progressive programme of screening, health reviews/assessment, immunisations and health promotion. It consists of four levels of intervention and all families are offered a universal service with additional support being given to families with more complex needs.

Examples were provided of how the programme works in practice, along with how health visitors and midwives work closely together at the earliest opportunity to share information so that intervention can be provided at the earliest opportunity. Simple strategies and systems were described to demonstrate how it works,

including having access to shared telephone numbers, and midwives and health visitors meeting on a monthly basis to share information on families, deliver antenatal classes together, and signpost families to groups run by the other professionals.

For joined-up working to be effective, commitment is required from all involved, as well as mutual respect, transparency and honesty. It is vital to share best practice and learn from mistakes. It requires flexibility to try new ideas and have systems in place to measure outcomes, manage risks, raise concerns, and have access to clinical supervision, and coaching and training opportunities. Most importantly, nurses and midwives must be the pioneers of change and have the courage to work in innovative ways that are evidence-based and measurable. They must also be prepared to volunteer their services, time, knowledge and skills, and share best practice locally, nationally and globally through presenting at conferences, writing for publication or offering to contribute to clinical pathways and policies.

Attending the conference has enabled me to build on existing knowledge and skills, learn from others, share ideas through networking and contribute on a wider scale through a community of learning.

**JHV**