

**American Association of Colleges of Nursing**

---

**American Association of Colleges of Nursing**

**Jonas Nurse Leaders Scholar Conference**

**Plenary Session Keynote – *LTG Patricia Horoho***

**28 October 2013, 0845-0930**

**J.W. Marriott Hotel, Washington DC**

Good morning Ladies and Gentlemen.

Thank you, **BG (retired) Bester**, for that kind introduction. Your work, both in and out of uniform, has been so valuable to advancing the profession nursing.

And to **Dr Jane Kirchling**, thank you for your leadership in the American Association of Colleges of Nursing.

To **Donald Jonas** and your wife, **Barbara**, I want to extend my thanks for recognizing the critical role of nurses in the American healthcare system, and that by advancing the profession of nursing we will advance the health of our nation.

You have identified some of the medical areas facing our military veterans, and through the **Jonas Veteran's Healthcare Program** more than 50 dedicated scholars are pursuing research focused on the men and women who have honorably worn the cloth of our Nation.

To all of the deans and associate deans of nursing, it is your mentorship that shapes the backbone of the medical care we provide.

To the Jonas doctoral scholars here this morning, I applaud your enthusiasm for advancing our profession, and we look to you to continue to build partnerships.

And a special thanks to **Dr Geraldine Bednash**, a former Army Nurse Corps officer, for inviting me to speak here today.

I am truly honored to be in a room with so many current and future leaders in healthcare.

This is a wonderful platform for us to exchange ideas and discuss strategy for a better tomorrow.

As a Nation, we are faced with challenges everywhere we look --

– from fiscal and job-market uncertainty, to increasing disease rates in our youth.

In times of challenge, there are also opportunities --- opportunities to re-examine how we conduct business, how we care for those around us, and how we **think** about health.

Challenging times help us identify the strength and adaptability of our leaders. Challenges highlight the significance of a common goal.

Wars have always informed the practice of medicine on and off the battlefield.

Wars have helped to advance areas of research, innovation, and treatment guidelines that have increased survival rates, improved recovery, and enhanced life after injury.

Tourniquets, shunned by many during the Vietnam War, returned to the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan as **every** Soldier, not just medical personnel, learned to use them properly in order to save lives.

I want to start off with short video that depicts the importance of battlefield medicine.

This video shows the raw environment of a battlefield, the emotional impact on the family and the healing transition that puts the warrior on the pathway to recovery.

It depicts the American soldier and reality of what may be faced on the battlefield.

It depicts the medical personnel at the tip of the spear.

It depicts the tri-service transport system required to move across 8,000 miles, stretching from Kandahar, Afghanistan to Germany...

... to Walter Reed Medical Center in Bethesda...

...to the Veteran's Hospitals and other facilities throughout the US.

That video shows the clinical personnel that have trained at your universities.

It depicts compassionate care, and it demonstrates the privilege Army Medicine has to provide care in a high tech, high risk environment.

We have 12 years of war with a large number of wounded, ill and injured service members.

We care for the family members who have been exposed to the stressors of deployment and the return from deployment.

They receive care in our communities – **all of our communities**.

Our service men and women in the Army National Guard and Army Reserves, our retirees, our veterans.

The care of our military is woven throughout the care of our Nation.

There is no better time than now for us to pro-actively partner.

To share our knowledge, expertise, and wisdom in order to identify those critical questions that we must ask ourselves and our patients – those questions that will get us to better health and better lives.

That is our Nation's request of us.

And **that** is our privilege as healthcare providers.

Not only are there medical questions and challenges that our Nation has been dealing with – post traumatic stress, concussive care, amputee care, women's health issues...

... there is a growing challenge facing Americans -- **our Nation** is facing a health crisis.

The health of our Nation does not just impact the cost of healthcare – it impacts how we train medical professionals...it impacts our communities...

...it even impacts our national security.

Yes...the health of our nation impacts our national security.

Here's how --

Did you know that only **one** in **four** Americans, aged 17-24, are eligible for military service today?

Three out of 4 are disqualified because of medical, weight, or legal issues? **That's 75% unfit for service.**

This is a clear and present danger to our national security.

The health of our nation, and the health of our military, are **not** separate entities.

Our Nation cannot overlook the issues that slowly threaten the health of our population.

The Active Duty obesity rates are significantly lower than the US average.

But, and here's the hook – do you see the shadow of another set of bars in the middle? Do you know who they are? They are our Veterans.

Are you surprised that the obesity rate of our veterans, after only a few years, equals and in fact exceeds that of average Americans?

It appears that once physical fitness is no longer a condition of employment, we tend to let ourselves go.

When our men and women take off the uniform, do they forget how to make healthy decisions?

Or did we miss an opportunity while they were being seen in our medical facilities?

Perhaps we incentivized getting the top score on the army physical fitness test, but missed the holistic importance of regular daily activity and adequate rest.

Are we missing opportunities to improve health when our children are in school?

What opportunities do you taken advantage of in your spheres of influence?

Let's talk about what we can do – what all of us in the room can do.

I believe that **this audience** is the key to influencing the health and well-being of our Army and our Nation.

Our Soldiers come from your cities, your hometowns, and even some of your families.

That is why I need your help. **You** are key influencers.

Within this room are people who have dedicated their careers to advancing the nursing profession through education, leadership, and innovation.

Individuals who inspire, influence, and advocate for change.

We have all seen the health of our country deteriorate over recent decades.

We know what “right” looks like, we talk to our patients and teach them what “right” looks like – yet here we are.

So we have to ask ourselves -- Why isn't it working?

How have we gotten ourselves into this situation?

The answer **isn't** more willpower, more self-control, or simply eliminating unhealthy options.

It's going to take a different kind of thinking to get us out of this situation.

And that's the unexpected insight.

I believe it's about **thinking**.

And that takes us to our brains.

It's where habits, both good and bad, reside.

It's where impulsive behaviors originate, and are controlled...or not.

Let me explain what I mean by describing the brain in a very over-simplified way.

The brain has 3 basic components

Survival, Emotional, and Thinking

Your survival brain is **powerful**...it's **hungry** and it keeps us **alive**.

Your emotional brain is your social center, it's your feelings...it wants to keep us happy.

The survival and emotional parts of our brain together make up your subconscious.

Your thinking brain...it's logical, rational, and analytical. It's the conscious part of our brain.

The majority of things we do: getting dressed, driving to work, washing our hands between patients...all occur with minimal conscious thought.

Without really thinking. We're on autopilot.

When it comes to day-to-day decisions, including those affecting our health, we rarely make conscious decisions.

Which is ok, until it's not.

Let me show you what I mean.

So what's your **survival brain** saying?

It's saying – "Eat it...**Now!**"

What's your **emotional brain** saying? "**Like it**"

I remember all of those birthday, Halloween and Christmas parties.

How about your **thinking** brain?

It's saying "**Leave it!**"

"I don't need the extra calories"

So who wins?

What if we give your **thinking brain** more information?

Okay...would you eat it now?

Is it worth 500 calories?

How about now?

Is it worth an hour of jogging?

It's **that kind** of thinking, informed by an understanding of consequences, that we need more of.

I might still eat the cupcake...but probably not a second.

And that's a step in the right direction.

Why is this awareness so important? In today's environment, messaging can be confusing to the population.

Our communities receive information at such a rapid pace, that what was good for us one day is bad for us the next.

What was considered unhealthy one year is now the key to a longer life and cancer prevention the next.

In today's environment, our subconscious brain is where most of our daily choices are made, and it is often wrong...leading us to **eat** more and **move** less.

And that threatens our short-term **wellness** and long-term **health**.

And there lies the reason we need to **think** differently.

We can surrender to these misguided **impulses**...

...or we can learn how to **master** them.

Listen closely to the following clip.

**This could be the first generation of children in the United States that lives less than it's parents.**

There is a **crisis** in America.

9 out of 10 Americans will die of a preventable illness.

Heart Disease, Diabetes, Stroke, Cancer...

The CDC predicts that by the year 2050, 1 out of every 3 Americans will have Type 2 Diabetes.

Most accept this as certain, not a matter of **if**...but **when**.

But it's not **when**...it's **if**.

The decisions we make every day determine **if**, not **when**, we will develop one of these life-threatening conditions.

It is a **choice**, not a sentence.

Food alone does not fully explain the epidemic of lifestyle-induced disease in our culture.

Our 24-hour lifestyle, lit by screens and fueled by caffeine, bears part of the blame.

Too much coffee, too many sweets, too many pills, and not enough sleep, not enough activity.

And it's not only us, but our spouses, children, students, coworkers, bosses, and just about everyone else around us.

In Army medicine we have a strategy – a way forward. We call it Army Medicine 2020.

We are moving from a **healthcare system** – a system focused on illness and injury – to a **System for Health**.

The World Health Organization recognizes that **Health** is a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.

Health and wellbeing happen outside our hospitals and clinics.

In an area I call the **Lifespace**.

It's our time at work and school, our time at home with family and friends, our time cooking, eating, and sleeping.

Within the concept of Lifespace, we have an initiative called the **Performance Triad**, a focus on **eating right, being active, and sleeping well**.

By focusing on these **three** elements, we can improve health beyond the clinic.

The average 20-minute appointment with a primary care provider, 5 times per year, is not sufficient to improve overall health.

That's only 100 minutes.

When you look at the growing cost of healthcare in America, did you realize that most of that spending is going to those 100 minutes?

Yet there is a pattern of poor health among Americans that spans an entire lifetime.

We are able to provide some of the highest quality healthcare in the world – but it is costly, episodic, and is focusing on management **after** the disease has developed.

Increasing costs and decreasing health outcomes is not sustainable – but it provides a platform for nurses to lead a charge.

We need to turn our focus to those areas where nurses can impact care – and it is outside of the brick and mortar facilities.

That focus on eating right, restful sleep, and being active – those are the tenets we must permeate throughout the Lifespace.

From personal behavior changes lead to societal changes and system changes.

Eating right, being active, and sleeping well. That sounds like a pretty simple prescription. In fact, think about what our parents use to tell us when we were in elementary school:

-go outside and play

-finish your vegetables

-it's bedtime

But what makes this different is that for the **first time**, Army Medicine is looking at these interventions:

...activity...nutrition...and sleep...

...through the unique lens of the **brain**. Both conscious, and subconscious.

When it comes to activity, why don't we move more?

Your **survival** and **emotional** brain don't want you to move unless you have to.

Your **thinking brain** knows that you should.

Who wins?



The winner is obvious.

This is the number of hours the average American is either sitting or lying down each day. 21 hours...

That's sitting at breakfast, on the **way** to work, **at** work, at lunch, on your way home, at dinner, on the couch and then off to bed.

For our kids, that's in the van, at school, at lunch, in front of the TV, the computer, the cellphone, and then off to bed.

...We weren't built for this...the human body was not made to be **THIS** sedentary.

It's toxic. And it's a problem.

We need to drive that number down by moving **more**.

Notice I am not saying exercise...I am saying **move more**.

We need to instill activity into every aspect of our lives, every day.

A small amount of awareness can go a long way.

This little device I wear on my wrist.

It measures my activity by counting the number of steps I take.

It makes me **park** a little farther away, it makes me take the **stairs** rather than the elevator, it makes me take the dogs for longer walks.

It's my **nudge**.

I've found that unless I'm measuring my activity, I simply don't know.

Think about it, if I asked **you** how much you moved yesterday, what would you say?

What else is important when it comes to activity?



Get at least **7** hours of uninterrupted sleep a night.

It may seem strange to prescribe **rest** for movement, but it's probably the single most important thing you can do to increase your chances of becoming active.

If you wake up tired, your done.

When you're tired, your thinking brain is at it's weakest.

You don't stand a chance.

We have started a pilot program at three locations that are looking at sleep, activity, and nutrition to enhance the performance of our Soldiers.

We have issued similar devices to help monitor overall sleep, activity, and track nutrition.

We are providing their unit leaders with tip cards to help implement the pilot program.

We also have an IRB-approved research study, and will be looking prospectively, creating a database that will enable the further exploration of the long-term outcomes associated with the Performance Triad.

We want to proliferate knowledge gained, and ensure science supports our efforts.

In addition to activity monitoring and encouraging rest, we have to look at nutrition.

Why do we **eat** what we eat? And why so much?

Your survival brain is primed for hunger, instilled long ago by evolutionary pressure.

Your emotional brain craves comfort foods...foods that we associate with positive experiences.

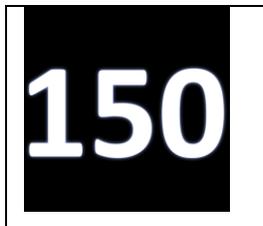
Birthdays, Fourth of July picnics, Thanksgiving.

And the thinking brain...

It knows what you should eat...

Fruits and nuts, vegetables and protein while limiting sweets.

So who wins?



This is the number of pounds of refined sugar that the average American consumes every year.

The winner is obvious.

That's sodas, juices, sweetened coffee and tea, and so-called "Energy" drinks.

And what about the link between eating and sleeping – no good eating decisions happens after 10pm.

Did you know that your body can go longer without **food** than without **sleep**. Pretty interesting considering how we often sacrifice sleep for other activities, more than we sacrifice eating.

We are just now discovering what happens when we sleep...and how important it is for your brain.

It doesn't simply shut down for the night like we used to think.

In fact...at times it's even **more** active when you're sleeping than when you are awake.

Your survival brain **knows** the importance of sleep.

Without sleep it compensates by craving rich foods and minimizing energy expenditure. It tells you to eat more and move less.

Your emotional brain is also active during sleep.

It's actually the part of the brain that does the consolidation of memories.

Your thinking brain...it gets a well-deserved rest.

Not only is sleep essential for learning and memory, it's also the **key** to health.

We trade hours of sleep for mindless channel surfing, Facebook and tweeting...  
...and we think there is no real cost.

**We couldn't be more wrong. Sleepy people make poor decisions.**

Sometimes oversights. Sometimes mistakes. Sometimes catastrophes.



Recent studies have shown that 24 hours without sleep or a week of sleeping less than six hours per night, is the same **cognitively** as a blood alcohol content of 0.10%

That's legally drunk.

That's not the person I want performing surgeries in our ORs.

That's not the person I want working in my ICU.

Not the person I want driving our children to school.

And not the Soldier I want at a security checkpoint deciding **friend or foe**.

**Sleep matters.** So how do we get more of it?

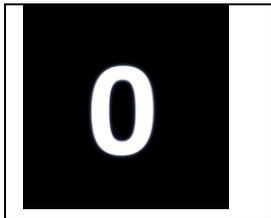
It doesn't have to be complicated.

But we **do** need to understand that **environmental** factors affect our ability to sleep well.

For instance, exposure to artificial light between dusk and bedtime suppresses the release of melatonin.

That makes it **more** difficult to fall asleep.

We need to establish an environment that is conducive to sleep.



**ZERO.** That's the number of blinking lights that you should have in your bedroom.

Right now the typical bedroom resembles a modern day science laboratory.

Remove chargers, Blackberries, iPhones, computers, TV's, cable boxes.

Anything that emits light or makes a noise.

Taking on these changes is not easy. But I knew that before I could expect my Soldiers and their families to make these changes, I needed to do it myself.

I challenged my husband, Ray, to make these changes.

I challenged my hospital commanders – and encouraged them to bring this to their staff.

And to all of you here this morning – here is an opportunity. What better leadership challenge than to influence those around you?

Challenge **your** families.

Challenge those you mentor.

Challenge your coworkers and your patients.

Challenge them to take on this prescription for 24 hours.

Then try it for 7 days.

Then before you know it, the healthy choices are no longer being made by the **thinking** part of your brain – they are made by your **subconscious** brain.

It becomes a habit to make healthy choices.

But my challenge to you in the room does not stop there.

I want you to ignite a spark across your spheres of influence.

As that spark grows, we will build irreversible momentum that will take our Nation to a better tomorrow.

Now, more than ever, nurses are playing a tremendous role in the health of our population.

Nurse-leaders continue to engage our country in the fierce conversations we need to have – advocating for the advancing roles of nurses across the care spectrum.

Nurses know that medicine is a **team** sport. We don't take care of patients all by ourselves.

We leverage that skill of team-work when we have a warm hand-off between a hospital discharge and a long-term care facility;

or with continuity of home care visits;

or with that reassuring voice on the phone when a parent calls a nurse advice line after the clinic is closed.

We are advocates for our patients **and** for our profession.

At our core, we work to build a stronger team because our patients deserve a better tomorrow.

Back in 2008, the Army Nurse Corps developed a strategic and patient-centered framework to reduce unwanted variance and improve outcomes.

After a review of the literature and collaboration with some of the nation's top civilian and military hospitals, this nurse-led initiative, called the **Patient Caring Touch System**, was implemented across Army Medicine in 2011.

Today, our job satisfaction and patient satisfaction scores continue to increase.

More importantly, our patient outcomes continue to improve.

As leaders in education, academics, and research, we are a strong force that is aimed at changing lives, improving health, and decreasing risks to our communities and our Nation.

Challenges in medicine don't scare me...they excite me.

Challenging times bring out the passion that inspired us to enter into nursing.

It shows us other avenues to affect change.

The health crisis we are faced with today is not written in stone.

The American population is fluid, dynamic, and connected.

And a critical element for reaching into our communities is here in this room.

I want this talk to remind you that the things you do for the rest of **today and tonight**, can lead to a **better tomorrow**.

And if we string enough of those **better tomorrows** together, we have a chance, a **good chance**, at a better life...and a healthier nation.

A **better life** is a **decision** you make. **You choose**.

My intent today was not to preach.

If this were an easy problem to solve, somebody would have already solved it.

But you are part of the solution.

Every aspect of medicine – whether you are working in women’s health, veteran’s health, underserved urban communities, or behavioral and psychological health – can be impacted if we look at ways to improve activity, nutrition, and sleep.

A System for Health is based **in** and **on** the community.

You **are** the System for Health.



I want to thank you all for letting me speak today.

**Serving to Heal...Honored to Serve.**