Celebrating the contribution of nurses

Nurses play a critical role in health care across Canada and the importance of their role has been amplified during the COVID-19 pandemic.

National Nursing Week celebrates the contribution of nurses during the second week of May, the same week as Florence Nightingale's birthday, May 12. That contribution touches aspects of care including long term care, intensive care, public health care, and during the pandemic roles such as contact tracing, policy development and planning for care.

The theme this year is #WeAnswerTheCall and was developed by Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) to showcase the many roles that nurses play in a patient's health-care journey.

"The pandemic brought to light the courage and commitment that nurses work under every day and showed the important role that nurses play in the community. This year, Johnson & Johnson, the world's largest and most broadly-based health-care company, has sponsored National Nursing Week to showcase its commitment to the well-being of Canada's health-care professionals," states the announcement of the week by the CNA.

"This global COVID-19 pandemic has shown the world the important role that nurses play in keeping people healthy across the lifespan" stated Annette Kennedy, International Council of Nurses (ICN) president.

In 1971, ICN designated May 12, the birthday of nursing pioneer Florence Nightingale, as International Nurses Day. In 1985, CNA members started to negotiate with the federal government to have the week containing May 12 proclaimed as National Nurses Week annually. Soon after, the federal minister of health proclaimed the second week of May as National Nurses Week. In 1993, the name was changed to National Nursing Week to emphasize the profession's accomplishments as a discipline, according to the Canadian Nurses Association website.

Last year, the World Health Organization declared 2020 the International Year of the Nurse and Midwife, yet another recognition of the vital role of those in the profession. The announcement was made prior to the WHO declaration of the pandemic that has continued to challenge nurses and other frontline health workers for more than a year.