Greetings! As we celebrate National Nurses Week 2010 (NNW) May 6 - 12, the American Nurses Association (ANA), the largest nursing organization in the US, and its constituent member associations (CMAs), salute nurses across the country with the theme “Nurses: Caring Today for a Healthier Tomorrow”. Every day, nurses make a commitment to building an even more powerful nursing profession to address the complexities of patient care, reshape the work environment, and influence broader health policies to benefit patients and the public.

“Nurses: Caring Today for a Healthier Tomorrow” exemplifies nurses’ caring and professionalism - be it at the bedside or in the halls of Congress. This past year, we saw history made, as health reform was made into law. I know the many months of debate proved divisive at times, but I truly believe that the reforms put into place will help us to build a ‘healthier tomorrow’. ANA continues to be a leading voice toward building better health care systems now that will ensure patients have access to affordable high-quality, affordable care now and in the future.

Serving as the ANA President, I was privileged to attend meetings at the White House at the inception of the reform talks. I also was proud to stand with my fellow nurses beside President Obama as he urged lawmakers to pass health reform legislation. I’d like to thank all of the ANA members who took part in town hall meetings over the summer, voicing the nurse’s perspectives on health reform. I also encourage nurses to continue advocating for meaningful solutions for health system reform, quality improvement, workplace standards and environmental issues.

Annually, National Nurses Week focuses on highlighting the diverse ways in which registered nurses are working to improve health care. Nursing is about growing and adapting to meet the public’s needs. Now is the time for all nurses to fully embrace and provide a new, even stronger level of leadership, partnering with physicians, pharmacists, and other health care professionals to direct and manage care effectively.

Today’s nurses must have the strength to care for patients during times of disaster and crisis; the commitment to remain involved in continuing education throughout their careers; and the compassion to provide hands-on patient care at the bedside – as we have done throughout the centuries. Moreover, at 3.1 million strong, nurses represent the largest group of health care workers in America, and we have the power to achieve much-needed reform in nursing and in health care. That is why it is important to take time out during National Nurses Week to thank nurses for all we do and to remind the public just how vital our nation’s nurses are to the well-being of society at large.

Of course, giving thanks, recognition and acknowledgement is only part of the reason we celebrate National Nurses Week every year. Another equally important reason is to remind the public of nursing’s contributions to the health and well-being of the nation. So, as you celebrate National Nurses Week this year, I hope you will also take a few moments to reflect on some of the challenges that also face nursing today, and the advocacy efforts of ANA in these areas:
• Alerting nurses about pandemic plans. This year, the H1N1 virus was declared a national emergency and a global pandemic. ANA advocated for better adherence to the standards on protective equipment, educated and encouraged nurses to get immunized and addressed policy concerns over mandatory vaccinations.

• Advocating for staffing levels that promote a safe and healthy working environment for nurses and to ensure the highest possible patient care. ANA continues to be a driving force in gathering data to make the case for safe nurse staffing plans. ANA is active in tracking and identifying nursing sensitive indicators and their effects on the quality of nursing care. To find out more about what you can do to advance safe staffing, please visit www.safestaffingsaveslives.org. This Web site serves as a one-stop source of helpful information with user-friendly tools. On the site, you will be able to find ANA’s “Principles on Safe Staffing”, background research on safe staffing, federal and state legislation and ANA’s legislative and legal action.

• Driving interest and support for addressing educational preparation for the RN workforce. Evidence shows that higher levels of nursing education are linked with lower patient mortality rates, fewer errors and greater job satisfaction among RNs.

• Leading efforts for safe patient movement equipment to reduce the risk of on the job injuries for nurses. ANA has been a strong advocate for reducing exposure to chemicals in the workplace, and encourages nurses to work within their environments to find healthy alternatives to potentially harmful chemicals.

On a personal note, this will be the last National Nurses Week message I have the honor of delivering as ANA’s President. As my tenure with ANA comes to an end, I am proud of what ANA as an organization, and nursing as a profession have been able to achieve in the past year; contributing to the health care debate, working to educate and vaccinate millions against both seasonal and H1N1 viruses, continuing efforts to improve working conditions for nurses, encouraging young adults to enter the nursing profession and educating the public about the critical roles that nurses perform. The more nurses are engaged and speaking with a united voice, the more influence nursing and its values will have on health care over the next decade. Nurses are the experts at knowing what their patients want and need, and always respond to both. That’s the power of nursing. I hope each of you has the opportunity to reflect on the work that you do, and acknowledge the work done by your nursing colleagues. Recognizing the excellent work done by nurses, and inspiring each other to make a difference each and every day, is perhaps the best way we may build a healthy tomorrow.