From Silence to Voice: What Nurses Know and Must Communicate to the Public


Reviewed by Connie Barden, RN, MSN, CCRN, CCNS

This book is a comprehensive call to action for nurses in every practice setting. Written by respected journalists Bernice Buresh and Suzanne Gordon, the book makes the case and then creates the access to solutions for nursing’s long-standing absence from and silence in the public eye.

From Silence to Voice is divided into 2 sections. Section 1, “Silent No More,” creates the compelling case for the need for nurses to end their silence on issues related to nursing and healthcare. By the end of the introduction and chapter 1, the authors’ points are so real that the reader may feel uneasy with the reality of the book’s central question: how can 2.7 million US nurses be invisible? Nurses are not invisible, the authors assert, they are instead silent and often ambivalent about the need or wisdom of speaking out.

As the reader grasps the grim reality of the absence of nurses from the public view and media’s eye, the authors then speculate about the benefits that might arise if the voice of nursing was heard. Not only would nurses benefit, but the entire healthcare system, including patients, would gain from nurses taking their place at the tables where decisions about health and healthcare are made. Buresh and Gordon outline the means, the motivation, and the opportunities that nurses have to make the move from silence to voice a reality.

The first section concludes with a thoughtful inquiry into the origins of the silence of nurses and how stereotypes help to keep it in place. Clear solutions are outlined as the authors offer thorough and specific discussion on how to begin to speak up. Readers are coached on how to speak without using jargon, how to talk about nursing research, how to tell nursing stories without breaking confidentiality, where audiences are found, and how to overcome fears.

The remainder of the book is a practical primer on how the news media work and how to reach them. From writing letters to the editor to talking to reporters and appearing on television, the authors draw from their years of experience as journalists to put together an all-inclusive manual for action. No stone is left unturned in directing and explaining to nurses how to reach the public effectively.

From Silence to Voice is a unique addition to the nursing literature in its approach, its practicality, and its utility. It is indeed unusual for a single text to describe reality to the point that it makes the reader uncomfortable and then to offer solutions so practical that the reader is ready for action by the end of the book. In the foreword, Patricia Benner suggests that From Silence to Voice should be a required text for all nursing students. This recommendation should be extended to another group of nurses —those who care about the future of nursing and want to be immediately inspired that they can make a difference for this profession.

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