

EDITORIAL

Connect 4.3

A vision for our future: the European federation of Critical Care Nursing associations

Wouter de Graaf
President.EfCCNa

The 2nd congress of the European federation of Critical Care Nursing associations (EfCCNa), held in Amsterdam November 2006, brought together more than 425 Critical Care Nurses from Europe and further afield. EfCCNa unites member associations from 22 countries and its aim is to represent the critical care nurses, critical care nursing and their associations by strengthening their professional positions. One of the difficulties in fulfilling this aim is the fact that there are so many national differences in the way that nurses are educated, the way that their professional discipline is organised, and the sharing of responsibilities between ourselves and physicians. In addition there are national differences in culture, religion, ethics and prosperity to be considered. However, there are similarities too. For example, although there are many thousands of critical care nurses, in every country, it is only a minority that is a member of a national association.

National associations play a vital role in the professionalisation of critical care. They are able to work in a collaborative way on many issues that would be very difficult of an individual nurse to tackle. Knowing that a group can achieve more than an individual can, is the basis of EfCCNa's philosophy: working together – achieving more.

Today's complex society is in a state of constant change, and we have to face up to many challenges and threats. Europe is huge, and within the European Community nurses are a relatively small minority and it is difficult to influence the policy makers. Nevertheless, in most European counties nurses represent a significant proportion of the working population and our large numbers mean that we can make a difference if we work together. We must not be naïve about policy matters and we should work actively to develop awareness of the challenges and threats in the short, medium and long term so that we can work towards solutions. It will help to increase our power and influence if we increase the number of member associations in EfCCNa.

EfCCNa can be proactive and set its own agenda. At the same time, we need to ensure are working with the right people, in a strategic way, to influence the agenda of the policy makers. We need to develop an effective strategy with a more direct approach towards the European and National parliaments, supported by good quality evidence on issues that we

consider to be important. We can use our member associations as a resource to gather information.

EfCCNa needs to become more actively involved in setting policy. One way that we can be of influence is to develop and publish position statements on different critical care issues, ensuring that each statement is focused on nursing. Furthermore we need to develop a strategic research and development programme, which is clearly linked to our position statements and policy issues.

By supporting national critical care nursing associations and their members EfCCNa can help to strengthen their positions, and ultimately to improve the quality of care of patients. A shared vision and the sharing of knowledge will help to prepare us for the future, which presents many challenges. Factors such as the ageing of patients (as well as the nursing workforce) with an associated increased incidence in the co-morbidities of critical care patients, the growing gap between the rich and poor (and limited access to health care), the need for trans-national mobility by nurses and how this links to regulations and law on professional qualifications and standards of practice are all highly relevant. And all of this is needs to be set in the context of our greatest challenge: an international shortage of qualified nurses.

What does this mean for the critical care nurse in daily practise? We all want good working conditions and to improve our knowledge and skills. Knowing that we are competent in what we do provides a sense of job satisfaction: it is important for us to feel that our patients are well cared for, and are receiving the best possible support and therapy. EfCCNa can help to support nurses 'at the bedside' by addressing their practice and education issues at an international level and working towards standards of practice that bring about improvements in care. However, this is not an easy task, and the way forward will require many years' of hard work by EfCCNa. Nevertheless, EfCCNa is a motivated organisation, and it has demonstrated with its many achievements over the last five years that *working together* we are indeed *achieving more*. For EfCCNa our philosophy is fast becoming a reality.