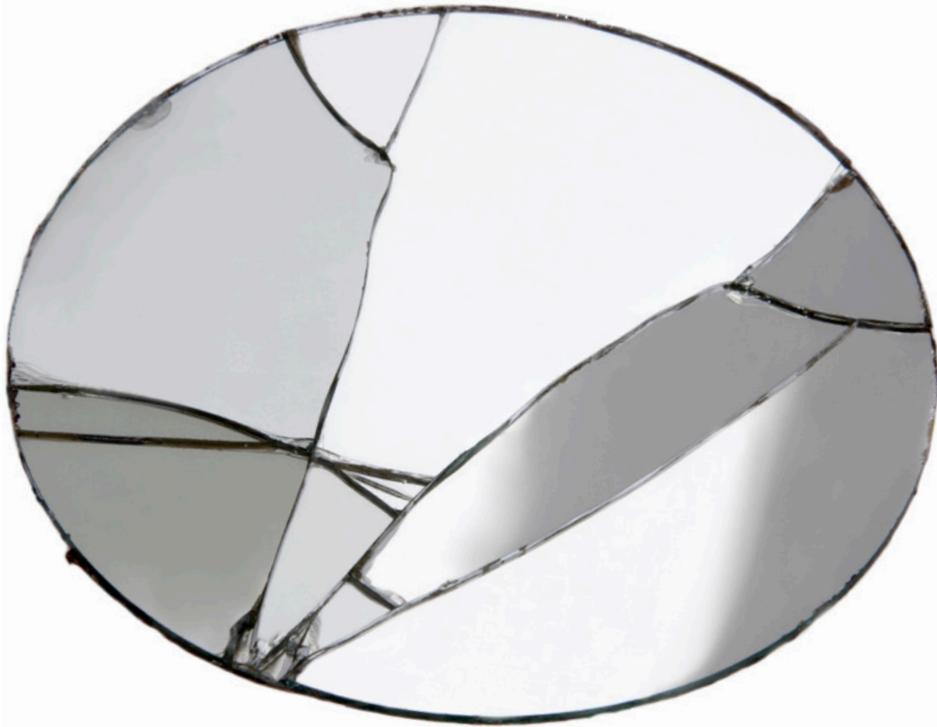


First, do no harm.



Second, have great insurance.

When things go wrong, your coverage really matters. For more than 25 years we have specialized in physicians' insurance. Working with multiple insurers allows us to offer you choice, competitive rates, and the benefit of one-stop shopping. Call us.

800-559-6711



RIMS-IBC

RIMS-IBC 235 PROMENADE STREET, SUITE 500, PROVIDENCE RI 02908

MEDICAL PROFESSIONAL/CYBER LIABILITY PROPERTY/CASUALTY LIFE/HEALTH/DISABILITY

A Last Hurrah: Memorial's Nurse Alumni Association Celebrates Centennial

SUSAN MCDONALD



Pawtucket nurse introduces a newborn to the infant's soldier father.

PAWTUCKET – For 59 years, from 1911 to 1970, the Memorial Hospital Training School for Nurses, later called the Memorial Hospital School of Nursing, trained women ages 18 to 25 as nurses. In 1916, the same year the first formal presentation of diplomas to school graduates was held, nine graduates formed the Nurse Alumni Association.

Members of the organization – many of whom stayed working at Memorial Hospital through the years – celebrated their group's 100th anniversary with a spring banquet May 18, at Kirkbrae Country Club in Lincoln. The event included the final business meeting of the association, which will dissolve due to lack of leadership.

Janet Sherman of Lincoln, the president of the Nurse Alumni Association since 2010 who retired in 1995 as a nurse in Memorial's post-anesthesia care unit

(PACU), talks about being in nursing school in the 1950s.

"At first, I wanted to be an airline stewardess," she laughs. "But, there was a prerequisite that you had to be a nurse to be a stewardess. And my older sister was a nurse. I really just wanted to be of service to people."

Service-minded

It was a similar calling that brought almost 1,000 men and women to the Pawtucket campus of Memorial Hospital, to a nursing school housed in an old Victorian manor donated to the hospital by the Goff family in 1910. The third floor of the home was the dormitory where students, under the watchful eye of house mothers who enforced curfews and lights out at 10 o'clock.

Clad in blue-checked chambray uniforms with long skirts and high collars, the first students were instructed to move into the dormitory with "one napkin ring, two pairs of black shoes or boots, and four sets of plain underclothing."

With as little as one year of high school completed, the students worked in the hospital – which in the early 20th century consisted of one building with wards for

men, women and children, and outpatient services – either from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., or 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. They had one hour off a day, one afternoon a week, and three hours on Sunday for "rest, study and relaxation." When off duty, they went to class taught by the medical staff in subjects like bacteriology and surgical nursing, and were expected to be ready for emergencies.

Their first clinical rotation, however, was always in the operating room, where Sherman says they "could understand why people were in pain."

Through various affiliations forged through the years, the nursing students at Memorial worked in the community with the visiting nurses, in the armed services during the war years, and at other hospitals in the area, including Butler Hospital, currently part of Care New England with Memorial.

Sherman remembers her rotation at the former Charles V. Chapin Hospital, where patients with infectious diseases like tuberculosis and polio were treated.

"We were always gowned, gloved and masked to protect us," she explains, noting that her time at Chapin was at the height of the polio epidemic during the 1950s.



The nurses of the mid 20th century.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MEMORIAL HOSPITAL/CARE NEW ENGLAND



The original Victorian-style Goff Building, site of the first nursing school and donated to the hospital by Pawtucket's Goff family in 1910.

A different era

In addition to the specific uniforms and caps, the design of which designated which nursing school a woman had graduated from, the training and practice of



nursing was very different than it is today, Sherman continues.

She trained in the cardiac care unit and remembers the advent of the 911 emergency system. It was a time when doctors may have depended on the nurses to help with the patients, but the nurses were required to stand when the doctors walked into the room to show their respect.

It was also a time when getting pregnant meant you resigned from your job. Many women would return once their child had grown to school-aged but they had to reapply and be rehired. Only single students were enrolled at Memorial's School of Nursing and yearbooks in the 1960s would include designations such as "first bride" or "second bride" with personal quotes beside the graduate's photo.

"It was good psychologically for us, too. We were more naïve back then," Sherman begins. "But, living in the nurses' home, we needed to learn to work with different people. It was good training."

Helping future nurses

The Nurse Alumni Association has given back to hospital for a century, organizing and participating in fundraising events. In addition, the group established the Esther A. Watson Scholarship Endowment

Fund at the University of Rhode Island (URI), which Sherman says will serve as the members' legacy.

Named for a long-time nursing director at Memorial and a graduate of the Memorial School of Nursing, the scholarship was created in 1970 and is awarded each year to a nursing major through the URI Foundation.

The scholarships will continue after the group dissolves, and any money left in the treasury will be put into the fund. Going forward, all Nurse Alumni members in good standing will be awarded lifetime memberships and their ancestors will be given added consideration for the scholarship.

Sherman says she regrets having to take the drastic step of dissolving the group but no one has stepped forward to take over the helm.

"It's with great sadness and regret that we've come to the decision to dissolve the Alumni Association," she says. "We all have fond memories of our nursing school days but there is no one interested in leading the group and it's time I step down." ❖

Susan McDonald is Marketing Communications Manager of Memorial Hospital and Senior Editor, Women & Infants Hospital.