The Year Ahead

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This season, in the northern hemisphere, is typically one of new beginnings, not only for blooming flowers and glowing brides but also for the Society of Trauma Nurses (STN) organization. The STN Board of Directors orientation would have started for newly elected STN board members after TraumaCon 2021. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on strategic and organizational activities, STN members voted to approve a 1-year delay in succession for the STN Board of Directors to remain in their elected positions until the 2022 Spring conference. I want to thank the members of the STN for the faith they have put in me to lead this amazing, resilient organization, along with the current dedicated STN Board of Directors, for another year.

After this (quite) unusual first year as president of the STN, I cannot help but look forward to a new beginning with visionary thinking. First, though, before we can welcome the future, it is important to recognize the past. The sacrifices made by STN members over the past year cannot be fully quantified or articulated adequately. It has been a time of fear, uncertainty, emotional burden, psychological distress, and physical exhaustion for nurses worldwide. The pandemic, social, political, and economic events have either brought people together or divided them, leading to a lot of soul searching and anxiety. Despite these trials and tribulations, there has been an unbelievable dedication and resilience demonstrated by all trauma health care professionals, especially those on the front lines.

The promise of widespread immunity through the COVID-19 vaccines has certainly been a light at the end of the tunnel, but there is still a long way to go for many of our families and communities. The loss of life we have witnessed is beyond what we could have imagined. None of us are immune to the long-term effects of personal loss and grief that we have experienced, sometimes in isolation. The health care professional, in all essence of the word, takes care of others. It is important to remember that self-care is essential for the prevention of burnout and compassion fatigue, as it directly influences our own health and how we care for others. This past year has challenged our ability to practice self-care, stay motivated, and be resilient and mindful as we strive to achieve the goal to support ourselves and others. In an effort to support and honor frontline nurses, there have been some amazing examples of care and compassion shown toward colleagues in the last year. I hope that is what we all remember most.

There was a social media post that really hit home for me. “We are not all in the same boat. We are in the same storm. Some have yachts, some canoes, and some are drowning. Just be kind and help whomever you can” (author unknown). This highlights the fact that we have all experienced loss and suffering on some level during this difficult time. In truth, it is hard to really know how someone has been affected by added stressors unless, as the saying goes, you have walked in their shoes. When you ask how someone is doing, do you listen not only to the words used to respond but also hear the tone and notice the body language? These key components of nonverbal communication tell more about how someone feels than words ever can. We need to reach out to offer kindness and support if we notice someone is struggling. We must remember, together, we have already been through and overcome more than anyone could have imagined. Together we are stronger. Together we will get through this.

To weather the past, we have to allow ourselves to acknowledge our emotions and experience our own dark moments. Only then can our inner light shine as we look to the year ahead. Once we clear our minds, we can be open to visionary thinking and accept new ideas. An innovative example was STN’s annual conference, TraumaCon 2021, trauma nursing’s most powerful educational and networking event for connecting with peers throughout the trauma continuum, that featured an interactive virtual environment with 2 days of educational sessions and networking. It was truly an amazing and successful event! Another advancement is the STN board commitment to
include diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) into every fiber of the organization not only by incorporating it into the mission statement and with the development of a task force but also by the addition of a DEI pillar in the strategic plan to incorporate DEI initiatives to all standing goals. Despite the pandemic and its accompanying social and economic crises and overall sense of uncertainty during the past year, fiscal year budget planning is in the final stages of strategic forecasting.

The future is an exciting, albeit uncertain, time. The STN Board of Directors and committee leaders are driven and inspired by what the organization is and can become through innovation and the development of strategic plan initiatives. STN leadership strives not to get bogged down by obstacles but constantly looks at the big picture, converting challenges into growth opportunities. To achieve STN’s mission, we need member involvement. STN members are the organization’s greatest resource to develop initiatives and for trauma health care clinicians and colleagues seeking a professional home. Together, STN strives to be a bright beacon for its members.