NURSES want every interaction with every patient to be safe, whether we’re administering a medication or performing central line care. It’s ingrained in us to do all we can to protect those under our care from healthcare errors, injuries, and other harm.

The very idea of patient safety—of doing no harm—is a significant, long-standing concern for healthcare professionals dating back to Hippocrates, the father of medicine, and Florence Nightingale. It runs through our Code of Ethics for Nurses with Interpretive Statements and is reinforced by our nursing practice standards. And it’s something nurses on the frontlines and across all settings think about, engage in, and advocate for 24/7, 365 days a year. Frequently, we’re a patient’s last line of defense, which is an enormous responsibility and, frankly, a contributor to our stress.

We also know that we are fallible, and errors and other adverse events do happen. Nearly 20 years ago, the Institute of Medicine (now the National Academy of Medicine) released the groundbreaking report, *To Err is Human: Building a Safer Health System*, which made very public the extent of healthcare-related errors and called for examining and improving systems, processes, and conditions to make healthcare safer.

Although some progress has been made in important areas, such as addressing common hospital-acquired infections, more is needed to make sure patients have the best outcomes and nurses have supportive, safe work environments. I encourage you to read the recent research article in *Health Affairs* by our colleague, Linda Aiken, PhD, RN, FAAN, FRCN, director of the Center for Health Outcomes and Policy Research at the University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing, and her team. They concluded that patient safety in hospitals remains a serious concern for both patients and nurses. One specific and alarming finding is that only 21% of hospitals examined showed sizable improvement in their nurse work environments, a critical component of reducing patient harm.

Despite this sobering news, the American Nurses Association (ANA) continues to work for meaningful change on several fronts. ANA is representing nursing on the Institute for Healthcare Improvement–convened National Steering Committee for Patient Safety. The committee was formed to vigorously address this ongoing public health crisis. It’s operating under the principles that preventable healthcare errors and harm can be eliminated, and that it will take a coordinated, collaborative response to move the needle on patient safety. Currently, they’re looking closely at key areas, such as how to build leadership and an organizational culture that enables and prioritizes safety; develop systems that allow those in healthcare to learn from, share, and, ultimately, prevent errors; increase engagement of patients and their families throughout healthcare; and implement strategies to improve the workforce’s physical and psychological safety.

We also need to think about our own practice settings and determine how we can work individually and collectively to ensure the health and safety of the public. One way is arming ourselves with knowledge by taking advantage of resources that enable us to become better practitioners. The ANA Enterprise has many resources and programs that can help. For example, ANA’s Principles for Nurse Staffing and our position statement addressing nurse fatigue both provide strategies for nurses and employers to create safer environments. By getting involved in our Healthy Nurse, Healthy Nation™ Grand Challenge, you can gain support and guidance to improve your sleep and reduce stress—issues with either can contribute to healthcare errors.

We also must continue to speak out—whether it’s when we see an unsafe practice or are given an unsafe patient assignment—and use our knowledge and skills to develop and share practical solutions up and down the line.

We must act now to make sure healthcare is as safe as it can and should be. For many years running, the public has named nurses the most trusted professionals. Let’s do everything we can to continue to earn that trust.

Ernest Grant, PhD, RN, FAAN
President, American Nurses Association