

news and events

Honouring the nursing profession

THE SPIRIT of Florence Nightingale was invoked at celebrations in Wellington to mark International Nurses Day last month. Nearly 300 nurses from around the country gathered in Parliament Building's Legislative Chamber to celebrate the birthday of the founder of the nursing profession. The celebration was hosted by Minister of Health Bill English, NZNO and the Nursing Education and Research Foundation (NERF) and was organised by former NERF travelling scholar Shelley Jones.

The highlight of the evening was hearing Nightingale speak in a message to nurses recorded around the turn of the century, when she was in her late 70s. She said: *"Here I am, no longer even a memory, just a name. I hope my voice brings to history the great work of my life. God bless my dear old comrades of Balaclava and bring them safe to shore. Florence Nightingale."*

The message was followed by a presentation written by Nightingale enthusiast and visiting fellow at Victoria University's nursing and midwifery department Jocelyn Keith and Jones. Nightingale's words and observations on nursing were brought to life by Wellington actor Vanessa Byrnes. They were accompanied by a commentary from Jones on their relevance for today's nurses.

The theme for International Nurses Day this year was "Healthy Young People = A Brighter Tomorrow" and four nurses explained how they helped achieve this goal through their practice. Broadcaster and former presenter and co-ordinator of the teenage radio show *Rampage* Kelly Tikao spoke about how the show promoted the safe sex message to young people. The show won last year's New Zealand AIDS Foundation Media Award and excerpts from it were broadcast.

South Auckland Health public health nurse co-ordinator Elizabeth Farrell, Healthlink South's youth services' nurse specialist/clinical co-ordinator Bronwyn Dunnachie-McNatty and Wellington paediatric oncology community nurse specialist Karyn Bycroft all told stories



Miss Nightingale



Nurses who spoke at the celebration are (from left): Karyn Bycroft; event co-ordinator Shelley Jones; Kelly Tikao; Bronwyn Dunnachie-McNatty; and Elizabeth Farrell. With them is Miss Nightingale, Wellington actor Vanessa Byrnes.

from their practice which demonstrated their commitment to young people's health.

Earlier in the evening, Health Minister English, "a member of the least respected profession", welcomed members of the "most respected profession" to the celebrations. He said had Nightingale been

working today she may have been working for a large scale advertising agency as she was a "public relations expert" who had successfully rehabilitated the role of the nurse from its "brutish and disreputable image".

The Minister said he admired the vision and reality she brought to the problems of health services. "She delivered on what she undertook to do and brought about real benefits for people in need."

Today's nurses had a definite role in the management of health, he said. Nursing values needed to be used as a motivation towards better health, better care and better relationships within the health system. "The most human, most sincere and most special aspect of our health system is the relationship nurses have with their patients."

The evening celebrations began with the launch of the NERF-sponsored story series in *Kai Tiaki: Nursing New Zealand*, "At the Heart of Nursing". The four nurses whose stories appeared in the first of the series, published in the May issue, all attended the celebrations.

Nurses and employers around the country marked the day in a variety of ways. In Dunedin, nurses enjoyed a dinner and debate; Christchurch nurses went to a screening of *The English Patient*; in Hokitika, nurses attended a celebratory breakfast where three students from Westland High School spoke on the IND theme; in Nelson, district nurses organised a breakfast; in Palmerston North, a mock court was held; in Wanganui, nurses distributed stickers and an information poster; in Auckland nurses wore NZNO stickers and distributed balloons; and in Northland nurses enjoyed special morning and afternoon teas.

NZNO chief executive Brenda Wilson said she was delighted to see nurses take over the Legislative Chamber supported by the Minister. "Who knows what we can achieve next if, like Miss Nightingale, we become more expert in public relations."

Nightingale's spirit seems likely to continue to inspire nurses.