



Sandy Summers, RN, MSN, MPH
Executive Director
The Truth About Nursing
203 Churchwardens Rd.
Baltimore, MD 21212-2937
410-323-1100
ssummers@truthaboutnursing.org
www.truthaboutnursing.org

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Senator George Mitchell, Chairman
Mr. Michael Eisner, CEO
The Walt Disney Company
500 S. Buena Vista St.
Burbank, CA 91521-9722

Dear Senator Mitchell and Mr. Eisner:

I am writing to urge you to end the sale of Disney's Jessica Rabbit 2004 Nurses Week pin and to refrain from "honoring" nurses in future years with such pins. The sexually suggestive Jessica Rabbit pin, which reinforces the harmful "naughty nurse" stereotype that has long plagued our profession, is not a good way to thank the skilled, hard-working nurses who are fighting a critical nursing shortage and associated short-staffing to save patients' lives.

Depicting the nation's 2.7 million registered nurses as female sex objects suggests that our work consists primarily of satisfying the sexual needs of physicians and patients. Such images discourage males and self-respecting females from entering the profession. In fact, nursing is a distinct science and an autonomous profession. Registered nurses receive 2-10 years of college-level training, and studies have shown that patients' lives depend directly on the availability and qualifications of the nurses who care for them. For instance, one recent study of nurse short-staffing--a primary cause and effect of the shortage--found that when the patient load of a nurse is doubled from 4 to 8, post-operative mortality increases by 31%. The global nursing shortage, which is only expected to worsen over the next two decades, affects us all.

Many who display negative images of nurses doubt that such images can really harm the nursing profession. However, as public health professionals at USC's Hollywood, Health and Society project and elsewhere can tell you, entertainment media do affect how people think and act with regard to health issues. A 2000 JWT Communications study found that

US youngsters in grades 2-10 got their most striking impression of nursing from the fictional television show "ER," and consistent with that show's physician-centric messages, the youngsters found nursing to be a technical field "like shop," a job reserved for "girls" and one too lowly for private school students. A Kaiser Family Foundation study found that "ER"'s message is so influential that one-third of their viewers use information from the show to make health care decisions. A key reason that nursing is in its current state--understaffed, underfunded and underempowered--is that the work of nurses is undervalued by the general public and health care decision makers, all of whom are consumers of media and advertising.

In addition to retiring the Jessica Rabbit nurse pin, I also encourage you to make amends to the nursing profession by supporting efforts to improve public understanding of the profession in a tangible way. The Truth About Nursing, which engages in such efforts, would be happy to assist you. We are confident that organizations such as Nurses for a Healthier Tomorrow would also be happy to work with you.

Please be part of the solution to the nursing shortage and the improvement of public health. Help us improve public understanding of nursing at this critical time.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sandy Summers', with a large, stylized initial 'S' and a long, horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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