Depictions of medical professionals have come a long way since General Hospital first aired. But when it comes to nurses, too often they are relegated to tired stereotypes, say authors Sandy Summers and Harry Jacobs Summers.

The pair, who penned the book *Saving Lives: Why the Media Portrayals of Nurses Put US All at Risk*, and are behind the Baltimore-based group *The Truth About Nursing*, have come out with a list of the best and worst portrayals of nurses of 2009.

The good ones offer compelling portrayals of nurses who go all out for the care of their patients. They also rise above one-dimensional stereotype of nurses, such as "the handmaidens, the naughty nurse, the angel and the battle axe," writes Sandy Summers, a Hopkins-trained nurse.

Topping the best list: Edie Falco's *Nurse Jackie* on Showtime. She's tough as nails, with a few, um, issues -- an addiction to painkillers and an affair with a coworker, for starters -- but she's human and fights for the best care for her patients, Summers writes.

Interestingly enough, some nurse organizations have been no fans of Jackie's, while others said they were willing to take the good with the bad -- as long as there's more positive aspects in future episodes.

Among the worst were ABC's *Grey's Anatomy* and Fox's *House*, which over the decade gave viewers the same old demeaning images -- nurses mocked by doctors and nurses as "silent handmaidens to physicians who provide important care."

Negative images of nurses on TV aren't just entertainment -- they affect real nurses and their patients, Summers writes. Getting it right is important in an era of nursing shortages where Summers fears the clinical needs of nurses could get overshadowed by poor depictions.

With the insane popularity of so many TV shows set in hospitals, it's an interesting argument. Clearly, the dashing yet cerebral physician tends to be the center of the universe on these shows -- hello George Clooney in the early ER days.

Do you watch hospital dramas? What do you make of their depictions of nurses?
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