

## Nursing advocate bringing message of profession's value here

Tuesday, October 12, 2004

By Virginia Linn, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Almost as soon as Alex Trebek uttered the Jeopardy clue on Sept. 7, a statement was being posted on a national nursing Web site and a letter zipped to the show's producers in protest.

The offensive phrase probably went unnoticed by millions of viewers of the long-running NBC quiz show, but it hit nurses like a wet snowball in the face.

The question? "Minor ailments can be treated by NPs (nurse practitioners) and PAs (these)."

The Jeopardy answer read: "What are physician's assistants?"

"The phrasing wrongly suggests that nurse practitioners treat only *minor* ailments, and that major ailments like cardiac disease, cancer, diabetes and asthma cannot be treated by them," wrote The Center for Nursing Advocacy in a statement.

"... Nurse practitioners care for patients in a wide variety of complex settings in which lives are on the line, from the certified nurse midwives who deliver babies to the nurse anesthetists who attend to patients during major surgery."

No slip of the tongue, subliminal message or demeaning depiction is too small or too great to be assailed by the Center for Nursing Advocacy in its mission to set the public straight on the true merits and skills of the modern nurse.

Founded by a group of graduate nursing students at Johns Hopkins University Hospital in April 2001, this organization waged its first attacks on the media, particularly against hit TV shows such as "ER" and advertising campaigns that often depict nurses as handmaidens or sex objects.

"When people see us as workers who are there to provide sexual services to physicians or patients they're not going to understand us as professionals," said Sandy Summers, 43, executive director of the group based in Baltimore. "We need the public to understand that nurses save lives."

Summers, an advanced practice community nurse with a background that includes three years in Cambodia teaching nursing instructors, will be in Pittsburgh Thursday to speak on a nursing panel for the Oncology Nursing Society.

The center got started after she and other nurses in the Johns Hopkins public health program were outraged over President Bush's first budget, which called for cuts to education in community health nursing.

"Why would someone cut nursing education at a time of a global nursing crisis?" she asked.

Summers said it was clear that the public had a poor understanding of the skills and capabilities of the 2.7 million U.S. nurses.

In addition to national staffing shortages, she's also concerned about a critical shortage in nurse educators and what she calls "pathetic" government funding committed to nursing research.

So far, the center has claimed several victories in convincing companies to pull advertisements: A Clairol ad that showed a nurse washing her hair in a sensual way; Pennzoil showing a naughty nurse and a Skechers sneaker ad showing pop star Christina Aguilera in sexy nurse garb.

Even Disney relented in a pin it designed to honor nurses for National Nurses Week in 2003 and 2004: nurse Jessica Rabbit (from "Who Framed Roger Rabbit?") with cleavage and a high slit up the side of her uniform.

The center is poised to combat producers of a stateside version of the edgy British nurse show "No Angels" that is in the



Sandy Summers

works. The story involves a close-knit group of nurses that British nurses say "fosters misimpressions of nurses as underworked, gossiping party twits more interested in sexual contacts with physicians than in caring for their patients."

In other goals, the center is building a nurse expert database to serve as a resource for media outlets and the public. The nonprofit center is a small operation that hopes to expand as interest in its mission grows.

And for Jeopardy fans, expect a question soon on the show that puts the work of nurse practitioners in a more positive light. In a recent letter to the center responding to its concerns, senior producer Gary Johnson wrote:

"We take seriously both the important work of nurses and the media's role in making the public aware of that work. ... At some future date, we will air another clue that will define the work of these health care professionals more fully and fairly."

First published on October 12, 2004 at 12:00 am

#### **More from Post-Gazette.com**

#### **More from the Web (sponsored)**

[Why Doctors Will No Longer Prescribe](#)

[Metformin \(WATCH\)](#)

(healthnewstips.today)

[\[Gallery\] Struggling Mom Wins \\$188](#)

[Million In Lottery. Then Gets Sued](#)

(Teastart)

[Clearly, Someone Didn't Think Before He](#)

[Acted. 26 Times To Be Exact](#) (Teastart)

[America's Deadliest Natural Disasters.](#)

[Death Coming From above.](#) (FRESH

FEED)

[\[Gallery\] Nadia Comaneci Trivia Facts](#)

[About The Perfect Gymnast](#) (DailyForest)

[\[what's this\]](#)