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NURSING'S NEW TV ICON

NURSE JACKIE: an adulterous addict with lousy ethics or a smart, skilled and subversive nursing anti-hero? The new black comedy/drama series that divided American nursing this year has hit our screens on Tuesday nights starring Edie Falco, who last played a mafia wife in the Sopranos, as an experienced emergency nurse with a bad back, painkiller addiction and a very idiosyncratic moral compass.

Nursing Review asked emergency nurse practitioner Michelle Geraghty and former emergency nurse leader Jessa Lawless for their take on Nurse Jackie (see [page 7](#)).

So far Nurse Jackie appears to have bewitched and amused NZ nurses rather than prompted the abuse she elicited from some US nursing circles. In fact, the New York State Nurses Association wanted a disclaimer tacked on to the end of the show telling viewers that Nurse Jackie was an "inspired" character. In a letter to broadcaster Showtime, the association's chief executive officer, Tina Oswald, said the public's view of nurses was influenced by television and "Jackie" had "no qualms about repeatedly violating the nursing code of ethics". And the National Federation of Nurses president said she found Nurse Jackie's worst behavior "exactly horrifying" and it made her "really sad".

So, not all were happy with a nurse who in the first 20-minute episode forges the patient's signature,

commits adultery in her lunch-hour with her habit-feeding pharmacist lover and flushes an abusive patient's severed ear down the toilet.

But the same episode also shows her finely honed skills picking up a doctor's fatal diagnostic error, passionately advocating for her patients, saving a fellow diner from choking while her doctor friend eats on and later being asked to work a double shift before nearly committing a fatal IV error through fatigue.

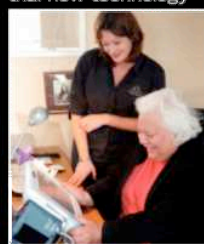
Fans of Jackie with all her problems, courage, compassion and expertise include American nursing media advocate Suzanne Gordon, who recently visited New Zealand, and Sandy Summers of the Truth About Nursing website. Gordon asks why nurses want TV to show "angels" in hospital. "Why don't they understand the difference between early 21st TV drama and a public service announcement for a profession?"

Summers, an arch critic of the portrayal of nurses in Grey's Anatomy and House, has called Nurse Jackie as perhaps the strongest TV portrayal of a modern nurse ever – a deeply flawed but tough, life-saving nurse with formidable clinical expertise and a sharp wit.

"You can only watch it yourself and make up your mind whether this subversive "angel" is more sinister than skilled, apical or simply good entertainment. ■

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ORIGINAL LETTERS RE DISCUSSION ON NURSE SCORE

LETTER CARRIES

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