As the largest and most trusted health care discipline, nurses are uniquely positioned to provide leadership in the delivery of quality care. Nowhere is this more obvious than in long-term care settings that service the growing population of older adults. Long-term care settings are places where nursing skills and interests are particularly well matched with residents' needs. They are also settings where there is enormous potential for nurses to innovate and implement models of professional practice that successfully integrate these settings into the mainstream of health care. Until recently, however, the relevance of strong nursing leadership to quality long-term care had too often been an unrecognized, unappreciated, and untapped resource in the industry. There is ample evidence that investment in professional nursing leadership is essential to the health and well-being of our nation’s most vulnerable older adults.

Over a decade ago, Nursing Clinics of North America published an issue that focused exclusively on long-term care. In that series of articles, long-standing challenges to the delivery of quality care were discussed, and potential solutions were proposed. What is most striking is that many of these same challenges persist today: inadequate staffing levels, lack of clinical leadership, and health care disparities. What is changing is the overwhelming public endorsement for greater governmental funding and resources for long-term care similar to those in the acute care sector. Most instrumental in the growing momentum for change has been the devastating effects of a pandemic, which were exacerbated in facilities that lacked a strong presence of professional nurse leadership. These heart-wrenching stories, indeed much of what we read in the media, portray long-term care settings as places of last resort, avoided at all costs not only by older adults but also by the very people who could make a difference, professional nurse leaders.

This issue of Nursing Clinics of North America brings together articles authored by leading gerontological nursing scholars who, together, provide a vision of what high-quality long-term care is and the policy changes necessary to make it a reality.
These gerontological nurse leaders tell us that long-term care settings have much to offer older adults and are exciting places to work when nurses have the autonomy to exercise professional leadership. Several articles focus on the knowledge and competencies needed to care for residents who have complex health issues: those who are frail, mentally ill, socially isolated, at risk for/experiencing infection, or at end-of-life. Three articles describe transformative models of care that rely on and promote strong nursing leadership: The Advanced Practice Registered Nurse, Intraprofessional Practice, and Age-Friendly Care Models. There is also an article on the staffing levels required and retention efforts needed to help ensure the delivery of high-quality care.

A common underlying theme across the articles in this issue is that they all address, in one manner or another, how quality care can be achieved in nursing homes through Transformational Leadership. One definition of nurse leadership is inspiring and catalyzing others to achieve shared goals and institutional mission in an environment where the context and meanings are evolving, thus the constant need to design new ways of achieving long-held values. Transformational leaders use knowledge and skills to inspire, influence, and motivate staff to provide high-quality care. Transformational leaders not only identify areas for improvement but also act upon and support team members toward common goals. Transformational leaders are proactive; they serve as a catalyst for innovation, and they create a learning environment so organizational realities are changed for the better. The articles in this issue support the development of transformative leaders.

Since 2020, there have been several commissions/panels that have been charged with improving and safeguarding the health and quality of life of residents who live in long-term care settings. These efforts are laudable. For years gerontological nurse leaders have provided compelling evidence that supports the need for strong professional nurse presence in nursing homes. Unfortunately, nursing leadership is most noticeable in its absence as we have seen over the past 2 years. As guest editors of this important issue, we feel the events occurring across the globe present an unprecedented opportunity to add the strong voice of expert nurse scientists, educators, and practitioners who, better than any discipline, understand how nursing leadership can transform long-term care.

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