

A Final Tribute: What Nurses Should Know About the Nurses Honor Guard

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Nurses provide a service needed by both the healthy and sick. Increasing complexity of medical and societal demands has been met by nurses which has led to an unwavering public trust in the profession (Dębska, et al.,2024). Bonds between nurses are strengthened through difficult situations that are faced together as they strive to meet a mutual goal of meeting their patient's needs. These bonds form an understanding of the nursing experience that others are unable to ascertain (Rodríguez-Pérez et.al.,2022). Therefore, it is fitting that nurses perform a tribute to their colleagues who have died. The nursing tribute performed at funerals or memorials is like a military tribute in that it involves releasing the nurse from their nursing duties.

In 2003 the Kansas State Nurses Association (KSNA) formed a volunteer group of nurses to honor a nurse's service to society at their funeral. Janice Jone, former president of the KSNA, was the creator of the tribute which was called the Nightingale Tribute. Duane Jaeger, member of the KSNA, wrote the poem which is included in the tribute (American Nurses Association, 2017). Thus, the Nurses' Honor Guard was conceived. In 2005 the American Nurses Association (ANA; 2017) sanctioned the Nightingale Tribute as a way of honoring nurses who have died. More groups started across the United States and in 2011 Julia Godby Murray created the National Nurse Honor Guard Coalition to aid nurses who are wanting to start a chapter in their state (Nurse Honor Guards Pay Tribute at Nurse Funerals Nationwide, 2023).

The Nightingale Tribute is performed by nurses who wear the traditional white uniform with a red lined blue cape clasped at the neck and a nurse's white cap. A traditional nurse's lamp, white rose and a triangle used for roll calling are part of the ceremony. The Nightingale Tribute is read and then the poem with the group sounding the "she/he was there" at the designated times. At the completion of the reading a white rose is placed on the coffin or given to the family and then all nurses in the audience are asked to stand. A roll call is sounded with a chime and ending with the release of the nurse from their nursing duties. Our colleagues, we honor you this day and present this white rose and light this candle to symbolize our honor and appreciation for being our nurse colleagues

The Nurses' Honor Guard allows recognition and respect for their colleagues but also impacts the families and friends of the deceased. This service can aid in the healing of the grieving and demonstrates the true essence of nursing who understand the sanctity of life and death (Leclerc, L. et al., 2024).

If you are interested in participating in the Nurses' Honor Guard or want to learn more, please contact the Nurses Honor Guard Kansas state coordinator, Sandy Morey, at (nowamsam@hotmail.com or 316-393-3093) or the National Nurses Honor Guard Coalition at NNHGC2024.org

THE NIGHTINGALE TRIBUTE

Nursing is a calling, a lifestyle, a way of living. Nurses here today honor our deceased ANA colleagues. Their life as a nurse is not remembered by their years as a nurse, but rather by the difference each of them made by stepping into people's lives ... by special moments.

She/He Was There

When a Calming, Quiet Presence Was All That Was Needed,

She/He Was There.

In The Excitement and Miracle of Birth or In the Mystery and Loss of Life,

She/He Was There.

When a Silent Glance Could Uplift a Patient, Family Member or Friend,

She/He Was There.

At Those Times When the Unexplainable Needed To Be Explained,

She/He Was There.

When the Situation Demanded a Swift Foot and Sharp Mind,

She/He Was There.

When a Gentle Touch, a Firm Push, or an Encouraging Word Was Needed,

She/He Was There.

In Choosing the Best One from a Family's "Thank You" Box of Chocolates,

She/He Was There.

To Witness Humanity, It's Beauty, In Good Times and Bad, Without Judgment,

She/He Was There.

To Embrace the Woes of the World, Willingly, and Offer Hope,

She/He Was There.

And Now That It's Time to Be At the Greater One's Side,

She/He Is There.