



Past Event: 2026 NCSBN Annual Meeting – CEO's Address Video Transcript

Event

2026 NCSBN Annual Meeting

More info: <https://www.ncsbn.org/past-event/2026-annual-meeting>

Presenter

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Hello, everyone. It's again such a great time. Love being at this meeting and speaking with you. So I want to let you know, I'm calling this the Guardians of Public Protection for a reason. You, as regulators, you know your story is not simply telling people that you regulate a profession. It's way bigger than that.

Your story begins with we safeguard the lives of millions. In Canada and the United States combined, last year there were 39 million admissions to the hospital. There were over 156 million ER visits.

Presumably, in every one of those situations, there was a moment of nursing. A point where a nurse interacted with a patient. And that doesn't even account for physician office visits, stand-alone clinics, urgent care, med spas. That probably tops all of it, sorry.

I digress. Or long-term care, right? Now, to put this in perspective, the population of the United States is approaching 350 million. The population of Canada just surpassed 40 million.

Simple math tells me this. That last year, the combined a nurse interacted with at least 50% of the combined population of Canada and the United States. And you in this room, every one of you, hold the trust of that population, communities that may not even know your name, but rely on your decisions every day.

Your work may be quiet, but I assure you, the impact is thunderous, huge. As regulators, as boards of nursing, as colleges of nursing, you have a unique and profound responsibility.

You are more than just regulators. You are guardians of the public protection. You're the architects of trust, and most importantly, perhaps, it is you, all of you in this room, who stand in the storm when the system shakes.

And make no mistake, the storm is here. We keep talking about, it's coming. Trust me, it's here. And you're here. That's important. You see, the storm is here because I can tell you, cybercrime is on the rise. Fraud is on the rise.

There's an explosion of AI. Phyllis talked about it, right? There is a deregulatory movement across the globe, and there is pressure from governors and ministers of health to prioritize speed, diversity, and constituent opinion polls over the essentials of public protection.

In moments like these, it is your leadership that cannot be quiet. It cannot be hesitant. I assure you, it will not be comfortable. But it is leadership that must be decisive, courageous, and above all, united. When we talk about the future of nursing regulation, right, we normally focus on things like...

You know, I hate looking back there and seeing a bright light and not seeing you people. Oh, maybe the sun is rising. I'm not sure what that's about. At any rate, sorry, I got distracted. ADD got me.

Got to get back. When we talk about the future of nursing regulation, we normally talk about systems, data, policies, right? But here's what I want you to understand: underneath all of that, underneath it is something way more fundamental, way more basic, and that is the ideals that shape how we show up to the people we serve.

And so as I reflected on the nature of that responsibility... This is really so NCSBN, isn't it? I like to shake it up. As we reflect on the nature of the responsibility, I actually am reminded of a book, some of you know I love this book, but I'm reminded of this book by Brandon Sanderson.

It's called "The Stormlight Archive," right? And in that book, there are some special, special men and women. And they have very, very special talents. They're called Knight Radiants. And they were selected and charged with protection of their world.

That meant they were charged with standing between right and wrong, between good and evil, between justice and injustice. They were charged to stand between the evil in power and those that were powerless, between harm and those who were going to be targeted for harm.

They were chosen to protect those that could not protect themselves. And the interesting thing about this, if you read this book, this series of books, what I learned is they are not powerful.

They're not bound... Their power is not bound by authority. It's bound by ideals. They don't actually act because they just can. They choose to act based on ideals. Ideals of purpose, courage, integrity, accountability. And you know what?

That is something that actually resonates with the work we do as one NCSBN, the working philosophy of one NCSBN. And so the Knight Radiants swear to a series of ideals, oaths, if you will, oaths that bind them not just to power, but to purpose and accountability.

And as I was thinking about it, in many ways, those oaths mirror the exact commitments you make as regulators. And so what I want to do is explore that connection a little further today. Now, my purpose is not because we need new values or to make you a fantasy fiction scholar. First off, I think we're okay with that, sorry.

Second off, I think our values are perfect, really. It is not that we need new values. To me, it's that a new metaphor sometimes provides us with looking at our purpose with some fresh clarity, a newness there.

And at this point, these ideals are important because here's my problem. If you're telling your story, if we're telling our story as regulators, our story should not begin with by what we do. Our story needs to

start with why we do what we do. And I don't know that we've ever went this far, but I want to say it loud and proud because I believe it.

Our story needs to start with the words because we care. Because we care, we do what we do, right? And so that old adage, you've all probably heard it, they will not care how much you know until what? They know how much you care.

That needs to be the framework of where the seed of our story is planted, and it grows and blossoms. That's because we care. And so the Knights Radiant, as a large group, they have this ideal that they swear to. It's universal.

It affects every order of Knights Radiant. And it is life before death, strength before weakness, journey before destination. It reminds a Knight Radiant that purpose always precedes action and that integrity must anchor every decision they make.

At NCSBN, you might find it interesting. We actually do have a universal ideal, and it applies to every level of regulator in this room: EO, board president, board members, staff. And that ideal is encompassed in two statements that we have, and you voted them in.

These were commitments you made. Here's the first one. Our mission, right? To support and empower nurse regulators in their mandate to protect the public. And our second one, the strategy statement: we protect the public and the trust in nursing through innovative regulatory solutions, insights, and expertise.

When you wrap those statements around our values, they tell us the same thing that the Knights Radiant ideal tells us. Purpose must precede action. It's in there. And because of the values, integrity must anchor every decision. More importantly, there's something else in there that I found amazing because it's an exact match to what we say as well.

And that is, journey before destination. Every regulator in this room knows, without question, regulation is a journey before destination. It is done no other way that I know of, right? And so that matches ours exactly.

It also provides...because of that, it provides what I call the map of that journey, right? Our two statements are the map. What do they do? They define the life of a regulator. They define the strength of a regulator. And they define the journey of a regulator. Everything else that you do flows, such as collaboration, modernization, innovation, flow from those two statements.

And just as the Knight Radiants could not wield their power without being grounded in the ideal, that first ideal, you as regulators, cannot wield your regulatory authority effectively unless it is grounded in public protection. Or, quite frankly, as Phyllis likes to say, and I really love it wherever she's at, she come up with this phrase, but the ideal that you give back to something bigger than yourselves.

It's our compass. It's our North Star. It is sort of our oath as Knights Radiant of NCSBN, right? You knew that was coming, right? You knew eventually I was going to get there. If you didn't, you haven't been following. It's why we do what we do, to protect those that can't protect themselves.

For our story, it's why we care. It's why we care. And so as I told you, the Knight Radiants journey mirrors ours in one way, and that is regulation always requires a journey before a destination.

If you listen closely...and what a great address the President's address was, Phyllis. What a great address that was. But if you listen carefully, she was telling this story, that it's a journey. Her address was not about a destination. It wasn't about a moment here where everything ended.

It was about a journey. The chair in the SIP that taught her, gave her wisdom and knowledge to actually grow and occupy the seat that she did today on this stage. But you know what she said about that chair? She gained what?

Wisdom, knowledge, learned things. And I think I heard her say, for whatever comes ahead, and my point would be, whatever chair she gets next time. It was not a destination. It was a journey. All of us need to realize that. But she also said something in there that I want to give her credit for, but it was putting some of the road signs on the journey.

It is a framework that she has championed for two years, and that the board of directors, the staff have embraced. And that is, listening leads to evidence. Evidence leads to action.

And action, purposeful, principled action, is what protects the public. Now that's not a slogan. I'm telling you, that is not a slogan. It is a framework for responsible regulation, an ideal of the first order. Why?

Because we care. It always comes back to that, because we care. Now, saying all that, I need you to remember one thing, because if we're going to live by the ideals we set up, then we need to understand that listening without purpose, catch that, listening without purpose is merely assumption.

Evidence without purpose is merely guesswork. And action without purpose is simply symbolism, virtue signaling. So my father, when he graduated high school, went off to the Korean War.

When he returned from the Korean War, he and my mother raised four sons, and he worked in a factory for the rest of his life, for the next 35 years, making no more than \$15 an hour his whole life. He was a man, a very humble man.

No one would know him. He's not anybody's hero but mine, I promise you that. Maybe my three other brothers, I certainly hope, but who knows. I haven't really asked them. Maybe I should. I probably should ask them. Anyway, but what he was, was one of the wisest men.

I didn't say he went to college, and he had a Ph.D., but he was a wise man. And he would say to me on numerous occasions, and most of you'll get why he had to say it more than once, he would say to me on numerous occasions, "Son, you have two ears and one mouth. Use them proportionately."

Now, my wife, who is sitting at the back of the room, and the board members who are spread across here know that I still struggle. You heard Phyllis allude to it. I still struggle with adhering to that sage advice. But I can tell you, I know without a doubt, that true leadership starts with listening. Great leadership starts with listening, deep, intentional, disciplined listening.

Listening to the public whom we serve. Listening to the nurses who are serving on the front line. Listening to educators who are sculpting, crafting the next generation of nurses. Listening to employers who are navigating real workforce realities.

Listening to data that is emerging, signifying risks that we should be paying attention to. Deep listening is where we need to head.

And so I want to introduce you to an order of Knights Radiant. You've heard about all of them. I just told you about that. But there's a couple of orders that I want you to know about. These edge dancers, who are special-order Knight Radiants, their ideal underneath the universal ideal was compassion that sees the invisible, listening beyond the surface.

They had the unique ability to notice people that others overlooked. Many of you in this room have this innate ability. You actually can hear the voices that are speaking softly or not at all. We dishonor this ideal, and look, I don't mean to hurt anybody's feelings, but we've all done it.

I've done it. I just admitted I do it. We dishonor this ideal when we stop listening because we already know. Or we stop listening because, well, we already have the data. We stop listening because, well, isn't it obvious? This is ways we should not act as leaders.

I am telling you, we want to honor this ideal that many of you have in this room by listening beyond the surface, listening to that student who is facing barriers that no one sees, to internationally educated nurses who are navigating a complex pathway, to nurses who are struggling with burnout, trauma, moral distress, communities with limited access to care, or that individual whose story is buried deep in a case file that would just take a lot of time to find.

We need to listen to this. Listening deeply reveals data, excuse me, reveals evidence that data alone cannot capture. To me, some of you are the researchers in here, and especially my staff have heard this.

Look, listening deeply means to listen to the voices behind the numbers. It means to listen to the voices behind the data because they give it depth and breadth. And when you do that, you get evidence that will lead to an action that is not only correct, but is compassionate.

And let me be clear when I say that. Compassion is not softness. Please understand that. It's not what I'm saying. At its very base level, compassion is simply recognizing our shared humanity. That's all it really is.

But for us, let me put it in a different perspective: for us as regulators who are grounded in public protection, compassion is seeing the composite of evidence and context grounded in public protection. We demonstrated this sort of principle to you as we started a year and a half ago doing listening tours.

To hear from you, all of you, at all levels, CEO, president, staff, didn't matter to us, bring it all on. We wanted to hear from you about issues, concerns, Phyllis mentioned this, issues, concerns, solutions related to our governance and bylaws.

We continued that deep listening exercise when we presented what we had heard during these listening tours to you at mid-year to gain more feedback, to determine if we were on the correct path to ensuring that our governance model was fit for the future.

Listening so that we can get evidence that will eventually lead to a decision, anchored in integrity, and that will lead to an action that is grounded in our shared purpose of public protection. Another group of Knights Radiant.

These were called Windrunners. Love the names. I'll let you adopt any of those. I don't know if Brandon Sanderson needs credit. Mike, you have to tell me. We're good? All right.

Good. All right. Windrunners were a special age Knights Radiant, and their sort of ideal...remember that there's a universal. Now they got a...There was protection that stands firm, evidence as a shield. Protection that stands firm, evidence as a shield. Windrunners had one oath.

That was it. And that oath, that was their ideal. Their oath was they live to protect those that cannot protect themselves. Many of you in this room have this ability: holding a shield of protection, grounding yourself in evidence to protect those that cannot protect themselves.

Now, we embody this as a group. Every time we turn listening to evidence to protect those we serve, to protect the patient who assumes every single nurse, listen to me, who assumes every single nurse is competent and ethical, we need to protect them.

Because, I'm sorry, while I hope that's true, I am not foolish enough to know that that is true. That's why you exist: to protect them because they believe it to be true. To protect a public who trusts the profession implicitly. They just trust.

We need to protect them. To protect that nurse who deserves clear, consistent, and evidence-based standards. Now, as we think about doing that, I need to make sure you understand for me what protection really means. For me, protection is not reaction.

It is not instinct. It is not even tradition. That is not your story. Protection is the disciplined application of evidence. When we use that, then protection doesn't become something we do. Remember, don't start your story with that. It becomes something that fulfills our purpose of protecting the public.

Our shared purpose as regulators. Our ideals as regulators. And that is particularly important. We started, in some ways, doing this about the same time, a year and a half ago. We did some focus groups. I hope some of you were involved in them.

We wanted to hear from members about what our...let me call it this way, member engagement programs, products, and services. And what did you need from that? What was adequate? What wasn't working so that you can do your job with the shield that stands firm? We heard from you.

That evidence has now turned into proposed solutions that you are going to hear more about this week as you continue your journey, right? It will also include, quite frankly, reimagining ICRS, which you heard a little bit about already, but you will hear more about.

These are important things that we learn by listening and saying, "We need to, what, support and empower you to do your jobs." That is our job. We are not...the staff are not regulators. Please understand that. Our job, though, is to make sure you, the real Knight Radiants, can do your job. Why?

Because we care. This order of Knights Radiant, they were called Skybreakers. The Skybreakers were encompassed, enveloped by this ideal, which is justice that does not flinch. Action as an expression of evidence.

Action as an expression. These Skybreakers were devoted to justice. Not because it was a feeling. Not because it was an emotion. It was a structure to them. Justice was a structure. It required for them clarity, consistency, and courage.

I will say, if we have learned nothing, nothing out of our Nightingale experience, and I hope we did learn something, but if we've learned nothing more, I at least have learned this. That we need those of you with this ability to stand firm, unflinching in your commitment to justice for the public protection.

And some of you have done that. And I know you've done that because I've watched you consistently and courageously show up and face your opposition for decisions you have made related to discipline. Grounding your decisions with evidence. Rooted deeply, defending them with evidence for the sole purpose of what?

Public protection. I will say there is...when we do this, how we evidence here at the Council and with you is when we take evidence, we turn it into action for the sole purpose of protection.

So, for instance, when you, as boards of nursing, make licensure decisions that uphold competence, for instance. When you make disciplinary decisions that affect or protect the public. Policies that reflect emerging realities. Standards that elevate the profession.

Oversight that ensures integrity of the education of nurses. These are the things you do as regulators under this ideal. And what better example of this than something you're going to vote on this week? The Model Act and Rules, right? So from listening to evidence to action, you are going to be presented a document, a document that provides unflinching justice rooted in public protection.

Using evidence to create a unified public protection framework with the ability of diversity of application. That's the work that you do.

That is protecting the public. That is justice that does not flinch. That is justice that is clear, consistent, and courageous. That's what you're going to vote on. Why do we do it? Because we care. Because we care.

Start of everything. The last one I want to talk to you about is this, and then I will leave you some final thoughts. There is a small unit of Knights Radiant. They were called Bondsmen. Bondsmen were probably the most powerful of all Knights Radiant. They were defined by this.

Unity that builds strength. Evidence as a common ground, and action as a shared purpose. They were charged, identified by their ability and determination to bring every order of Knights Radiant together, every unique ability together, to get them to stand on common ground and focus on a shared purpose, to become a singular strength, a mighty strength that none of the individual units could do on their own.

I got to tell you, our board of directors has been a great example of this. Over the last two years, 11 different people, EOs, board presidents, staff with different abilities, but they have come together as a single unit and a single voice, dedicated to ensuring aligning with national standards, strengthening partnerships across states and national borders, working with educators, employers, policy-makers on a shared purpose of public protection and building trust across the profession.

And so I want to say to you presidents and EOs in this room, you are in a unique position to be a Bondsmen, to take the unique abilities of your staff and your board, get them on common ground, identify the shared purpose, and in that shared purpose, you will have an unstoppable force for public protection.

Be the Bondsmith. Now, I want to be very clear. When I talk about unity, I need you to understand, I am not talking about a simple agreement. That is not unity to me. Consensus, that is not unity to me. Unity is alignment around the truth. Simple for me, very simple.

That's unity. Align around the truth, because you will then bring those people together, give them a common ground and action that will move them forward as a unit, an unstoppable force. While we've just begun this journey, I think the APRN Compact that Phyllis mentioned is an example of this, bringing people together, listening, seeking common ground while we have groups of diverse opinions, competing agendas, and divergent purposes, right?

But the courage to bring everybody together anyway and say, "Let's seek evidence that gets us to a common ground which will lead us to a destination grounded in public protection." And so I leave you with these thoughts.

Your journey over the next two and a half days, you're going to be in very critical conversations, discussions, votes, votes that will, in fact, impact the future of nursing regulation and this organization.

I ask you, as you go through that, that you keep these five things. Be anchored in these five things, if you will. A vision that sees beyond the moment. Integrity that does not bend under pressure. Courage to act when acting is hard. The humility to listen when you already know.

And the discipline to let evidence, not emotion, guide your decisions. If Knights Radiant teach us anything, it is that leadership anchored in an ideal is lasting leadership.

Excuse me, that accountability, paired with compassion, builds trust. And that action, purposeful action, grounded in evidence and anchored to our shared purpose, is the way we protect the public. And so leave this room knowing that you are the quiet strength behind the safety of millions.

You are the guardians of public trust. You are our public protection. You are the architect's trust, and you are the ones who stand in the storm to usher, steward, if you will, a profession that touches every life.

Everybody has heard the story about the Good Samaritan of the Bible. I know you have because it's immortalized everywhere. You don't even have to read the Bible and know that story.

But I want to ask you to put it in perspective. Why was the Good Samaritan immortalized? It certainly wasn't because he just acted. You may think that, but look deeper at that story. It wasn't because he just acted. It wasn't because he had some extra knowledge of nursing or medicine. It wasn't because he was rich.

He is immortalized for one reason, on hospitals, on buildings, on policies, on laws. And that reason is because he cared enough to act. His story started with because he cared. And so like the Knights Radiant, your ideals are not just words.

They are commitments renewed in every decision you make throughout this journey. And why? It's my prayer, because you care. And with that, I say thank you.