

It's Time to End Use of the "R" Word

By Toni Sugg, RN
Orthopedic/Burn Nurse
University of Colorado Hospital

Many in the field of healthcare know that the term 'retarded' is outdated. However, it's not widely known that there is now a law that mandates use of updated terminology.

Rosa's Law changes references in Federal statues on topics of health, education and employment that currently refer to "mental retardation" to refer, instead, to an "intellectually disability". Rosa's law was signed by President Obama October 6th, 2010.

Unfortunately the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition (DSM-IV) still utilizes this outdated language.

Student nurses at the National Student Nurses Association (NSNA) convention held in Salt Lake City recently passed Resolution 2 to show their support of Rosa's law:

IN SUPPORT OF INCREASED AWARENESS OF ROSA'S LAW WHICH CHANGES THE TERM "MENTALLY RETARDED" TO "INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY".

This resolution passed NSNA House of Delegates without rebuttal. All nurses are now being called to action and are encouraged to support the national awareness campaign promoted by Special Olympics called Spread the Word to End the R-word. This year the event was held March 7th but anytime is the right time to add your name and commit to end using the r-word.

1. Everyone within the health care system can go to www.r-word.org and sign a pledge to personally eliminate the use of this word in daily practice or choose to create a Spread the Word to End the R-Word within their community. Event ideas will be outlined below.
2. Everyone is encouraged to contact publishers of articles and/or textbooks that use the outdated terminology. Please request that the term "intellectual disability" be used in place the term "mentally retarded" when such language is found in print.
3. Forward this article to professional organizations within healthcare to increase awareness directly to professions that

will be shaping the patient cares for individuals with intellectual disabilities.

The goal of Resolution 2 is to create awareness within the nursing and student nursing community and through out the health care system and join together in a common voice to clearly state to the American Psychiatric Association, publishers of the DSM-IV, that language concerning individuals with intellectual disabilities (ID) must be updated. A major advocacy group for the ID population, American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities-formerly The American Association on Mental Retardation formally presented recommendations to the DSM-V ASD and Developmental Disorders Subgroup, February 22, 2010 stating "Nationally and internationally the term "intellectual disability" (ID) is replacing the older term 'mental retardation' as widely accepted, the term is the preferred term since it reflects the changed construction of disability, aligns better with current professional practices that focus on functional behaviors and contextual factors, provides a logical basis for individualized supports due to its basis in social-ecological frame-

work, is less offensive to persons with the disability and is more consistent with the international terminology.”

Action among student nursing groups continues. Regis University, Denver, CO Student Nurses Association (RSNA) authored Resolution 2. This year will be the third year Regis University will be hosting a campus wide awareness day sponsored by the Regis’ Office of Disability Student Services (ODS) with assistance from RSNA. Signature table are set up in the Student Union staffed by both representatives ODS and RSNA. Students sign a banner pledging to eliminate the R-Word from daily use and are given the

website www.r-word.org with instructions to go on-line and pledge on line, joining the national Special Olympics tally. T-shirts, posters, bracelets and pencils are all distributed. The bulletin board and door near the ODS office also promotes the event. Also a dialog is scheduled with community leaders, nursing students, members of the ID community, and the general public.

Since Resolution 2 has passed student leaders in several states including Ohio, Arkansas and Utah have been working with Regis University event coordinators to learn more about creating Spread the Word to End the R-Word events on their campus. Events can be created in

any and every community. Just go to www.r-word.org and click on events for additional information.

Toni (Antoinette) Sugg is an Orthopedic/Burn Nurse University of Colorado Hospital. She is a May 2011 Graduate of the Regis Nursing program.

She has worked with Special Olympics since her junior year of nursing school and it is her passion. She is helping members of the health care system can make a significant impact on the topic of “R” word use by joining in her effort.

Toni can be reached at sugg724@regis.edu.

Reprinted with permission from the Colorado Healthcare News. To learn more about the Colorado Healthcare News visit colhcnews.com.