Celebrations have long been planned for 2020, the International Year of the Nurse and Midwife, declared by the World Health Organization and International Council of Nurses in honor of the 200th birthday of Florence Nightingale. The American Nurses Association expanded National Nurses Week, traditionally celebrated in May, to National Nurses month “to expand opportunities to elevate and celebrate nursing,” a time to reflect and celebrate the role and accomplishments of nurses worldwide.

May 2020 will now and in the future be remembered in a far different way: The time the world was in the midst of a kind of war—a pandemic that will claim tens of thousands or more lives in our nation and stretch our healthcare system to the breaking point and beyond.

It is fitting, maybe even ironic, that in this year and this month the contributions of nurses—which, frankly, many take for granted—are at the forefront of the media and the minds and hearts of a grateful nation and the world like never before.

Every day the COVID-19 pandemic brings terrible news: rising infection rates and worst of all, lives lost.

Testing for the virus has fallen far short of what is needed. Shortages of personal protective equipment such as masks and gowns mean that providers, including our members, face risking their lives to care for desperately sick patients. Ventilators needed to save the most seriously ill patients are in short supply, and the drugs needed to keep patients on those ventilators are projected to be in shortage soon.

Adding to that is economic turmoil, the loss of income, businesses, and jobs. With the cancelation of elective surgeries, many of our members are losing income and jobs. The ground is shifting under our feet, and we find ourselves experiencing the fog of war: rapid change, a mysterious enemy, anxiety, exhaustion.

Disasters such as wars and pandemics push humanity to the limits of our courage, ingenuity, and resilience. Heroes emerge in every war, and healthcare providers, including you, our members are serving courageously and tirelessly on the front lines. What we are hearing from members is heart-wrenching, maddening, inspiring, and humbling. I have never been prouder to be a CRNA and to lead this organization.

In this issue, we have shared two stories of members in different states who are meeting unprecedented challenges with innovation, selflessness, and humanity. More stories are coming in, and we will be sharing them in the months to come.

While this pandemic is like nothing we have experienced in our lifetimes, nurses and CRNAs have a long history of serving in battles such as this. It is also fitting that May marks the 200th birthday of Florence Nightingale. Nightingale came to prominence for championing infection control during the Crimean War, when more soldiers were dying from infections than from battle injuries. Nightingale was put in charge of nursing British and allied soldiers in Turkey, and she and a team of nurses greatly improved the unsanitary conditions at a British hospital to reduce the death count by two thirds. She went on to lay the foundations for professional nursing and founded the first scientifically based nursing school.

Nightingale’s experiences during the Crimean War certainly changed her, and she changed the world as a result.

When we emerge from this pandemic, and we will, the world will change. It has to after a war has been fought and won. We will change, too. Lessons will be learned, and we will look at many aspects of our lives, our healthcare system, and our nation in different ways.

One lesson already learned is that unnecessary, burdensome barriers to practice need to be removed so that we can serve our patients at the top of our skills and licensure. The recent, temporary removal of practice barriers that we fought for so hard and for so long is a start. It needs to be permanent.

This pandemic is indeed a war, and we have to fight aggressively on numerous fronts, for our patients, for our own safety, for our livelihood, and for our communities. Let us know what you need, whether though social media, or especially through the link on our COVID-19 resources page (aana.com/covid-19).

I want you to know that we hear you, and we stand with you in this fight, and we will get through this together.