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CELEBRATE NATIONAL NURSES WEEK!

National Nurses Week begins May 6 and concludes May 12, the birth date of Florence Nightingale, the founder of modern nursing. The theme of this year's celebration is "Nurses: Building a Healthy America," reflecting the commitment nurses make every day to their patients, communities, and nation. It's no surprise that for the seventh straight year, Americans rank nursing first among occupations for honesty and ethics in the annual survey conducted by *USA Today*/Gallup.

Nursing has been in existence in the United States for more than a century. Home care nursing began in the 1880s, when public health nurses traveled to patients' homes to care for the ill, teach family members how to provide care, suggest ways to improve health, and comfort the dying. It was a time dominated by infectious diseases and high death rates.

The arrival of the trained nurse eased the family's burden of caring for the sick at home. Nurses also assisted new mothers by providing them with necessary prenatal care, helping with home deliveries, and educating them on how to care for their babies. The Visiting Nurse Association has been part of the proud profession of home care nursing since 1934.

There are more than two and a half million registered nurses in the United States. The number of Americans age 65 and older is projected to increase to more than 70 million by 2030. As America's elderly population rapidly grows, nurses will play a pivotal role in the future of America's health care system.

National Nurses Week seeks to raise public awareness of the importance of nursing to America's health care and of the need for more people to consider entering the field as a profession.

National Nurses Week is also an opportunity for all Americans to take a moment and appreciate nursing professionals, who each day bring care and comfort to the frail, sick, disabled, and dying.

Although nurses are officially honored during this week of celebration, their invaluable contribution to our society continues each and every day of the year. Thank you, nurses!

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