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# Lynn YOUNG

**....wakes up with a policeman!**

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One morning this week I awoke to the voice of the Chief Constable, Manchester Constabulary. His message was both interesting and profoundly sensible.....

He talked for a few moments (time is always short on the Today Program, Radio 4) on the increasingly impossible demands being placed upon the police force in modern times. As in healthcare the public have been encouraged to expect high quality standards from their local police service. Our friendly Chief Constable spoke eloquently and convincingly of the breadth of skills now required by police men and women. He was allowed by the interviewer to carry on. As I recall, he said:

*“.....the police are now expected to prevent and manage crime, be your local friendly bobby, act as social worker and be capable of taking on the role of surrogate mental health nurse”.*

It is timely to highlight Chief Constable's message as nursing has, for many reasons been receiving a bad press in recent times. He spoke about the desperate problems of widespread mental health illness and how strong the link is between mental illness and crime and unsociable behavior. He did not call for police to receive more training on the management of mental illness, but, instead emphasised the value of community mental health nurses being deployed to work more closely with their local police.

Music to my ears, hearing such common sense and wisdom at the beginning of the day. The point is; a major attribute of the nursing discipline is its breadth and ability to function in a range of diverse settings. The police force and certain nurses need, therefore to be better integrated, supporting each other to provide more appropriate care to people, being perceived as criminals, but who sadly are mentally ill.

So many of our citizens who are considered to be a burden in our communities, without doubt, suffer from severe mental illness. Such people could lead better and happier lives, if they received the right care and treatment.

Experienced police men and women know this only too well and need the support of fellow mental health nurses, in order to better fulfill their responsibilities.

While a certain number of nurses are currently employed to work in custodial areas, we need to be more ambitious and consider other opportunities for further integrating nurses and members of the police force.

Such a development would improve the care of mentally ill people, who frequently land up being arrested by the police and being placed in entirely the wrong and hugely expensive setting. Prisons are significantly more costly to run than Eton College.

A dear friend of mine, who happens to also be hugely talented, brilliant, skilled and a joy to be with was recently sectioned under the mental health act. He, needed to be, but, sadly at the scene of his total breakdown was manhandled, almost assaulted by the police.

This is not a criticism of the policemen concerned, but the manner in which my friend was admitted to hospital could have been more gentle had one or more, mental health nurses been present.

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While the need to section individuals is extreme there are many other instances when a potentially fraught situation could be calmed and rendered almost serene with the intervention of the dream team - the perfect blend of excellent policing and nursing.

Our Chief Constable from Manchester ended his brief Radio 4 interview by saying that, for the main part police folk do their best, but that prisons and other custodial settings are full of people who are mentally ill. The crimes committed by them, were as a result of mental illness, rather than being bad.

We need to seek out excellent mental health nurses and direct them to their particular Chief Constables, so that the ideas so eloquently described by our Man in Manchester have a good chance of becoming a reality.

So, despite economic meltdown, let's reach for the stars and strive to prevent the mentally ill from being inappropriately dealt with by policemen, who, themselves, appear to long for superb mental health nursing comradeship.