

CFA Communications Corner: July Issue

How to Write a Letter to the Editor

With the recent Supreme Court ruling on the Affordable Care Act, it seems that everyone—from elected officials to your next-door neighbor—is sharing an opinion on what will best improve the nation’s health care system. Your opinion on this topic is especially valuable. As part of the Campaign for Action, you know that nurses are critical to providing high-quality care; you have an opportunity to share that view in local and national press—particularly now, when health and health care reform are such “hot” topics—via a letter to the editor.

Have you seen a recent news article on the health care system that missed an important perspective? Did the article leave out something critical—like the vital contribution nursing makes to quality patient care? Submitting a letter to the editor is an effective way to contribute your expertise and unique perspective to issues you care about.

A letter to the editor responds to a news article, editorial, or op-ed that has already appeared in the newspaper. It provides new information, a correction, or a perspective different from that of the original article. And it’s easier to do than you might think! Here are some tips to help get you started.

- **Take a Position** – Take a stand either in favor of or in opposition to a position expressed by the editorial or article that prompted it, or offer a new perspective or information that was not included in the article. Use your research or your organization’s talking points to back up your position.
- **Be Specific** – Focus on a particular issue that the article or opinion piece raised. You risk diluting the letter’s overall impact if you address more than one issue.
- **Be Brief** – Keep your letter to one or two paragraphs. If you find that you have a lot more to say, consider submitting an op-ed article to the paper. (For more information, see the tip sheet, “How to Write and Place an Op-Ed” in the “Resources” section at RWJFLeaders.org.)
- **Cite the Original Article** – In the first or second sentence of your letter, mention the title and date of the article your letter is responding to: e.g., “Dear Editor: Your recent coverage of the issue of the uninsured (“Health Care in America,” June 13, 2012) was a thoughtful piece....”
- **An Opportunity to Say Thank You** – If the coverage is particularly good, you could open your letter by thanking or congratulating the reporter or newspaper for their work.
- **Edit and Try Again** – Write and edit your letter carefully. If the letter isn’t published, consider submitting it to the comment thread at the end of the original piece in the online edition. In some cases, comment threads attract more readers than the letters column.

Take a look at a few examples of letters to editors about nursing that were recently published.

- [Nursing Programs are About Quality Care, Equity](#)
- [Letter to the Editor by Tanya M. Wilson on Ethics: The Value of Nursing Ethics. What about Nurse Jackie?](#)