



OPEN LETTER TO THE NURSING COMMUNITY

November 9, 2012

The Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) is celebrating the life of Dr. Helen K. Mussallem, a remarkable nurse leader who contributed tremendously to the nursing profession and to the lives of those around her. She passed away on November 9, 2012.

Dr. Mussallem was our executive director from 1963 to 1981, a time of tremendous growth for CNA. Helen led our organization during the acquisition of CNA House, the building at 50 Driveway in Ottawa that remains our home today. Across a stellar international career, she became one of the most compelling and influential figures in Canada's nursing history, and she is still the country's most decorated nurse.

Born and raised in Prince Rupert, British Columbia, Helen graduated from the Vancouver General Hospital School of Nursing and, after studies in administration at the University of Washington, returned to Vancouver General (VGH) for six years as an operating room supervisor. Throughout World War II she served overseas as a nursing sister — an experience she described as “treacherous.” After the war, Helen obtained a baccalaureate in nursing from McGill University and then, after another four years at VGH, a master's degree in education from Teachers College, Columbia University.

She was the first Canadian to receive the McManus Medal from Teachers and went on at Columbia to become the first Canadian to obtain master's and Ph.D. degrees in nursing. Helen's doctoral work focused on nursing education, and her landmark 1960 report, *Spotlight on Nursing Education*, was highly influential for shifting nursing education from practice to academic settings.

Over the years Helen received seven honorary doctorates and many other awards, including the nation's highest honour, the Companion to the Order of Canada. The International Red Cross also bestowed on her its most prestigious award, the Florence Nightingale Medal.

Helen was an inspiration to many generations of nurses. As founder of the Canadian Nurses Foundation (CNF), she devoted much of her time and energy to nursing education and research. Through CNF's Helen K. Mussallem fellowship, she has made it possible for nurses to pursue their master's studies.

CNA recently welcomed Helen back to CNA House to help us uncover a 47-year-old time capsule she helped create and to assemble a new one. That Helen was able to celebrate this piece of history with us is a memory I will cherish — one among many I have of this formidable nursing leader.

I join with all nurses in Canada in acknowledging Helen's lasting legacy to our profession and our country. All of us at CNA and CNF celebrate her life, her outstanding achievements and the many lives she touched. I encourage you to share your memories of Helen through the [online memorial book](#) that has been set up. We offer Helen's family, friends and colleagues our thoughts, prayers and heartfelt sympathy.

With respect and caring,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Barbara Mildon". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Barbara" being more prominent than the last name "Mildon".

Barbara Mildon, RN, PhD, CHE, CCHN(C)
President, Canadian Nurses Association