

# Taking Media Into Our Own Hands

**NNU nurses are not waiting around for mainstream news organizations to tell our stories. Instead, we're creating our own outlets for informing, educating, and entertaining. A STAFF REPORT**

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**Q**UICK. NAME THE LAST TIME you saw a direct-care registered nurse interviewed on the nightly news about health insurance reform or skyrocketing healthcare costs.

Or about our national epidemics of obesity and diabetes?

When was the last time you even saw a real, practicing, bedside nurse on television at all? Or heard one on the radio? Or quoted in a national news magazine besides this one? (Soap operas and fictional programs don't count!)

Probably never, is the answer. Though registered nurses are among the most knowledgeable, educated, frontline healthcare providers in the country, their voices are rarely ever heard or consulted by mainstream media organizations. They turn to Dr. Oz or Dr. Phil, or in the case of healthcare reform, insurance company CEOs, to weigh in on health and health policy issues.

National Nurses United has been more successful than most organizations in getting registered nurses presented in the media as healthcare authorities, but it's an uphill climb. Mainstream media doesn't view our dysfunctional healthcare system from the same perspective that nurses do.

That's why nurses need to take media matters into their own hands. While we'll continue to influence how the mainstream media covers healthcare issues, National Nurses United is partnering with television and radio producers to create programs in which nurses get star billing, and to explore other ways of reaching our nation's communities.



Nurse Talk RN hosts Dan Grady and Casey Hobbs cutting it up in the studio

“Especially in terms of health policy, the voice of those of us at the bedside—the nurses—is missing or ignored in the mainstream media, and it’s a credible voice that the public should have direct access to,” said DeAnn McEwen, a critical care RN and a CNA/NNOC copresident. “We see the effects of our failed social policy at the bedside because we see patients and their families’ lives deteriorating along with the economy and the environment. We can connect the dots for people. Our voice would be one of advocacy to influence healthy policies and reset the nation’s moral compass.”

This spring, NNU is helping GRITtv with Laura Flanders launch *The Nurses’ Station*, a new segment of its daily, 30-minute progressive current affairs program that airs on Dish network and DirecTV on cable and public television stations nationwide, and is also available online. GRITtv approached the nurses because of our public fights to extend Medicare for all, nurse-to-patient ratios, and our ground-breaking political campaigns taking on corporate money in politics and candidates such as Meg Whitman. Recognizing that nurses are respected as the most ethical profession, and are out there mobilizing when so many seem to be disengaged, GRITtv producers see nurses as progressive role models. Collaborating on the segment was a natural for NNU because we want to broadcast our message in a variety of platforms, and know that nurses are hungry for real depictions of their lives and concerns.

*The Nurses’ Station* would tackle news headlines and other issues of importance to nurses and patients, but with a nursing twist. For example, the January shooting in Arizona of U.S. Rep. Gabrielle Giffords, which also killed six in the crowd, was covered around the clock from much the same angle by all the major news organizations. Was the alleged gunman, Jared Loughner, a druggie? Was he a left-winger or a right-winger? Was he a disturbed loner?

GRITtv producers approached the story from a big-picture angle by interviewing Tucson registered nurse Rexanne Darnell about the severe cutbacks the state has made to mental health services and Medicaid programs. These kinds of mental safety net programs might have helped avert this tragedy.

“We’re seeing very, very violent patients and patients who, sadly, haven’t been hospitalized for years and years,” said Darnell during a

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GRITtv interview. “They’re coming and saying, ‘I used to get a good medication and I used to have a case manager who followed me and helped me. But now I have nothing. I’m terrified to leave my house.’ They’re becoming more and more paranoid and staying in where they’re at. They can’t go and seek help for themselves. It’s up to us to monitor, to help, to assist them because they don’t know when their needs are not being met.”

*The Nurses’ Station* plans to explore many more issues of concern to RNs and the wider public, including how Obamacare is affecting individual states and how RNs in states such as Texas and Florida have managed to organize despite traditionally anti-union climates. And since RNs understand that patient health doesn’t just depend on how many vegetables a person eats or what kinds of medications a person takes, the program will also delve into how forces such as the economy influence health and health access, and even international issues.

“This segment is where the grit of everyday nursing meets the analysis of our healthcare system to form a unique, compelling program,” said Michael Lighty, director of policy for the California Nurses Association/NNU. “Media looks for sensational stories. GRITtv covers the stories that change lives.”

Experts who have studied the image of nurses in the general media agree. “Nurses are patient educators and are therefore the best professionals to present health information to the public,” said

Sandy Summers, an RN who runs the nonprofit group, The Truth About Nursing, and is coauthor of *Saving Lives: Why the Media's Portrayal of Nurses Puts Us All at Risk*. "When nurses educate the public, they're not only giving them valuable health information, the public is also learning that nurses are health experts—a different image than most television shows portray."

*The Nurses' Station* plans to debut some time in March with a segment following up on many of the patients originally featured in filmmaker Michael Moore's document *SiCKO*, which showed how insured patients were often denied care by insurance industry bureaucrats. Four years later, how have many of the patients in the film fared under our deteriorating and changing healthcare system?

On radio, NNU continues to sponsor *Nurse Talk*, a weekly radio program airing in Boston, the San Francisco Bay Area, and available on the Internet, that's hosted by registered nurses Casey Hobbs and Dan Grady. The show has been running since 2009 and now reaches 50,000 listeners per month. Hobbs and her partner Pattie Lockard got the idea to create an hour-long interview and variety show along the lines of National Public Radio's popular *Car Talk* program. "We said to each other, 'This show would be hysterical if we had nurses do it,'" said Hobbs, who currently works as a hospice nurse. "People like to talk to nurses; they don't talk to doctors. The idea was to educate and provide information, but also have fun."

Almost any material is fair game for *Nurse Talk*. The hosts have recently examined serious topics such as massive insurance premium hikes by the nation's largest HMOs, workplace violence against nurses, and the need for national RN-to-patient staffing ratios. In the same hour, they field often hilarious health questions by phone from listeners and interview quirky RN personalities, such as the Laryngospasms, a group of practicing nurse anesthetists who create and perform medical musical parodies. Hobbs and Lockard aim to expand their listenership and would love to air their radio show on a station during drive time (peak commute hours when many listeners are in their cars).

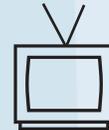
Today, many registered nurses also get their news and learn about issues via the Internet, whether it be through websites, blogs, bulletin boards, their Facebook and Twitter friends, or their professional LinkedIn network. In recent months, NNU revamped its website, [www.nationalnursesunited.org](http://www.nationalnursesunited.org), to be more streamlined and useful for registered nurses. National news affecting healthcare and nursing features prominently on the homepage, and buttons to all of NNU's social media profiles, like Facebook, our Twitter feed, our YouTube channel, and our Flickr photo albums, are easy to find and click near the top of every page. A link to this publication is listed under "RN Resources."

NNU produces a whole host of sometimes funny, sometimes serious, but always informative, videos on topics ranging from what it's like to organize at a new facility to testimonials about the need for safe RN-to-patient staffing ratios. Often the videos simply provide coverage of our events that you just won't find on network news or your local tv station. You can watch them all on our YouTube channel, comment on them, and share them with friends and coworkers.

NNU is also exploring other social media platforms to further connect nurses to the organization and to one another, to inform and educate them, and to relate experiences that otherwise might never get shared with a wider audience.

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# How to Watch, Listen, Read, and Share



## The Nurses' Station on GRITtv Launch date TBD

GRITtv airs four times daily on Free Speech TV (Dish Network channel 9415 and DirectTV 348), on cable, and on public television stations. Check out [www.grittv.org](http://www.grittv.org) for where to watch and to view past episodes.



## Nurse Talk

**Boston area:** Listen on station WWZN 1510AM every Saturday at 11 a.m. EST or live stream at [www.revolutionboston.com](http://www.revolutionboston.com)

**San Francisco Bay Area:** Listen on Green 960AM every Sunday at 2 p.m. PST or live stream at [www.green960.com](http://www.green960.com).

**Podcasts** are available any time at [www.nursetalksite.com](http://www.nursetalksite.com), and you can also download and listen through [TheRadioFactory.com](http://TheRadioFactory.com) or iTunes.



## National Nurses United's social media platforms

**Visit our website** at [www.nationalnursesunited.org](http://www.nationalnursesunited.org).

**Friend us! Our Facebook profile** is under "National Nurses United."

**Our Twitter feeds** are @rnmagazine, @nationalnurses, and @protestintheusa.

**Check out photos** of everything we're doing at [www.flickr.com/nationalnursesunited](http://www.flickr.com/nationalnursesunited).

**Watch videos on our YouTube channel** at [www.youtube.com/nationalnursesunited](http://www.youtube.com/nationalnursesunited).

Also check out the California nurses' channel at [youtube.com/calnurses](http://youtube.com/calnurses), the Minnesota nurses at [youtube.com/mnnurses](http://youtube.com/mnnurses), and Massachusetts nurses at [youtube.com/MNAWebmaster](http://youtube.com/MNAWebmaster).