A threat to the nursing profession’s future that is yet to be fully recognized for the silent epidemic it has become in the world’s largest caring and most influential provider group, nursing.

Our profession is at a new frontier due to a convergence of many forces including the economy, health care reform, four generations in the workforce, technology innovations, and new roles emerging for nurses. With all these advances and as exciting as our new frontiers are, a concern that our path will be impeded by our old ways of thinking, acting, and being exist. As there is much to do and much to change if we are to evolve into the vision set forth in the IOM Future of Nursing Report.

The transformation of our profession requires vision, commitment, new behaviors, and leadership, but it must start with seeing the need to change. Our profession has long been one of care, compassion, and competency, all of which we have shown to those who are in need of our care. It is time for us to add courage to our acumen, because without it we will not be able to face the external challenges ahead of us, or those internal to our profession, like bullying.

To name a thing is to take its power away. Nursing’s secret that exists in our noble, trusted and ethical profession 11 years running (Gallup, 2011) is Bullying. Berry et al. (2012), described in their recent study findings that 76% of new nurses will experience bullying in the first 3 months of practice, and that 52% will be the direct target of workplace bullying. Probably the most distressing factor is that these bullies are other nurses, who still believe that nurses “must pay their dues”, or that “eating our young in nursing makes them stronger” or that it is their “duty to toughen up these young nurses for their own good”. Nothing could be further from the truth?

The real problem is not the young inexperienced nurse but the experienced nurses who are bullies, and those that stand by silently and allow it to happen. The cost of bullying behavior is in the loss of bright and talented nurses who leave the profession, increasing turnover, destabilizing patient care systems and putting patient safety at great risk. It is in fact, almost immeasurable in its cost to society.

Benner’s “Naive Eclecticism” teaches us that we must sometimes seek the council or advice from those outside our profession to help us see our “bridge” solutions. We are all socialized by way of our family, friends, professions and communities in which we live and grow to think, act, respond and behave in certain ways. To think the answers are always within those same circles that may have created the issue is somewhat naive and to not find strength in diverse opinions is to miss a great opportunity to learn the value of eclectic wisdom.

Examples of Bullying: Withholding important information from a peer needed in the care process. Not sharing known physician trigger behaviors, i.e. calling at 3am with incomplete information. Physical intimidation or threatening violence against a peer. Malicious gossiping. Socially isolating peers with malicious intention.