Daily care provision in our profession has always been a delicate dance on most days and the world barely takes notice. The work we do in elder care is nothing short of a miracle every day. The past 35 years of serving this population, both staff and residents, gives me the right to say that.

Yes, there are bad apples in every profession, and ours is no different, but when you take a 30,000-foot-view of what we do every day we are dancing backwards in 6-inch heels without breaking a sweat and keeping time to the music. And still no one notices. That is, unless there is a problem.

Does anyone else find it interesting that now, in the time of COVID-19, we are finally getting some consistent national attention? It’s not all positive attention and of course, the blaming game is on steroids but, if we look past the hysteria we see that people, real people, not with residents in our communities, are beginning to give us a second glance and stepping up.
It looks like social consciousness is starting to be raised in our direction. Families are speaking out about how much they want to see their parents, how great the staff is, how much they rely on the care provided and are naming staff one by one. The issues are becoming more personal when we see how the staff is being supported not only by the elder care communities but by society in general. Putting signs of thanks on property, sending cards to staff, leaving messages of support for staff are just a few.

I’m getting a little tired of hearing that we should have jumped on this sooner. How? We had our head down providing good care at the same time the virus stole into our elders’ bodies and then our own FROM THE OUTSIDE. Our care did nothing to cause it and while we are at it, we need to acknowledge that as it spread through our facilities we did what everyone else was doing. We learned every day and took action as quickly as we could.

While the current situation is dire, it can also be viewed as an opportunity for all of us to shout out about how amazing we are. We don’t do that enough. We never have. I know some professionals in our field who still won’t say they work in nursing homes when asked. In fact, there seems to be an undercurrent of fear in our arena that if we open ourselves up and show our great selves, the media or others will start picking us apart. So what? They will likely do that anyway.

It’s time to share the incredible ways you are providing care NOW. People are listening NOW. Don't wait. Now is the time when the spotlight is on us. Show what you are doing to help pass the time for the residents, how your staff is taking extra measures and how you are caring for them. Of course we have had to yell loud enough to get that attention and try to move the issue from what we are doing wrong to how people can help. It’s not a slight of hand, it’s the real issue.

I’ve been using a lot of “yes, buts” to lift us up.

-When asked if I am aware of how high the death toll is in long-term care, I respond with, “yes, but are you aware that our profession is currently caring for over 3 million people all with varying diseases? In fact, the standard of care given to our nations elders is extremely high.”

-Here’s another one: “I heard that staff members are walking off the job.” “Yes, but excellent care is still being provided. In fact, yesterday the residents had a parade through the halls thanking everyone.”

-“How could it be that nursing homes weren't reporting the number of COVID deaths?” “Yes, but all of the deaths WERE being reported every day. Now they are asking us to use a completely different reporting system so there is a lag as we learn a new method while juggling the old system.”

-My personal favorite: “They are stacking bodies up in coolers and that’s inexcusable.” “Yes, but if there is nowhere to put a body because the morgue is backed up, it is far more respectful to place them where they can be moved when the virus gives up. And by the way, the staff members who are responsible for moving the residents will never get over the trauma of this. They know every single one of the residents and had to put their lives on the line to carefully move the people they cared for.
McKnight's Long-Term Care News is the pre-eminent national media brand for caregiving professionals in skilled nursing and post-acute care. We help you make a difference!
No one is going to brag for you. You have to do the bragging. Amid all the chaos you will have to speak loudly. Honestly, the way we are caring for our residents at this time will likely be the gold standard for elder care in the future. Deepak Chopra said, “Every great change is preceded by chaos.” Standing in the chaos of now, we have the opportunity to set the stage for great change if we make everyone aware of the amazing things we are doing and show people how they can help us.

P.K. Beville began serving long-term care in 1983, providing psychological services. In 1997, she founded the nonprofit Second Wind Dreams®, making dreams come true for those in elder care and authoring the Virtual Dementia Tour® currently offered worldwide. Beville is an international speaker on dementia care and serves as CEO emeritus of Second Wind Dreams.