

CELEBRATING NURSES MONTH 2022

RUTH SLEEPER, RN, BS, MA



A NURSE FOR ALL NURSES

As a young student of the MGH School of Nursing (class of 1922), Ruth Sleeper endured the rigors of classroom training and hands-on patient care. Years later, as superintendent and later director of both the school and the MGH Department of Nursing, she recognized that the long-held practice of hospital-based nursing apprenticeship needed to evolve into a profession that required not only this practical experience but also academic training. Sleeper set out to create a nursing curriculum that would revolutionize nursing practice and training.

*Ruth Sleeper caps MGH
School of Nursing students
from the class of 1951.*

Photo: Massachusetts General Hospital
Archives, Helen Sherwin Collection

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*Ruth Sleeper (center)
with students from the
class of 1964 Coordinated
Nursing Program.*

Photo: Massachusetts
General Hospital Archives,
Helen Sherwin Collection



*Ruth Sleeper (circled)
with members of the
class of 1922*

Photo: Massachusetts
General Hospital Archives,
Helen Sherwin Collection

In 1937, Sleeper conducted a survey among various hospital and school audiences for the reorganization of the MGH School of Nursing. At that time, student nurses comprised the majority of hospital nursing staff; there were very few paid staff nurses on the patient floors. In addition to their course work, student nurses often worked 52 hours a week on the patient wards. Sleeper often stated that “students *were* the nursing service.” In her resulting report she recommended changes to the nursing school curriculum that included requiring the hospital to hire 90 graduate nurses to replace nursing care provided by the students, freeing up the students for more academic work and some well-earned free time. This curriculum would eventually become the standard for nurse education.

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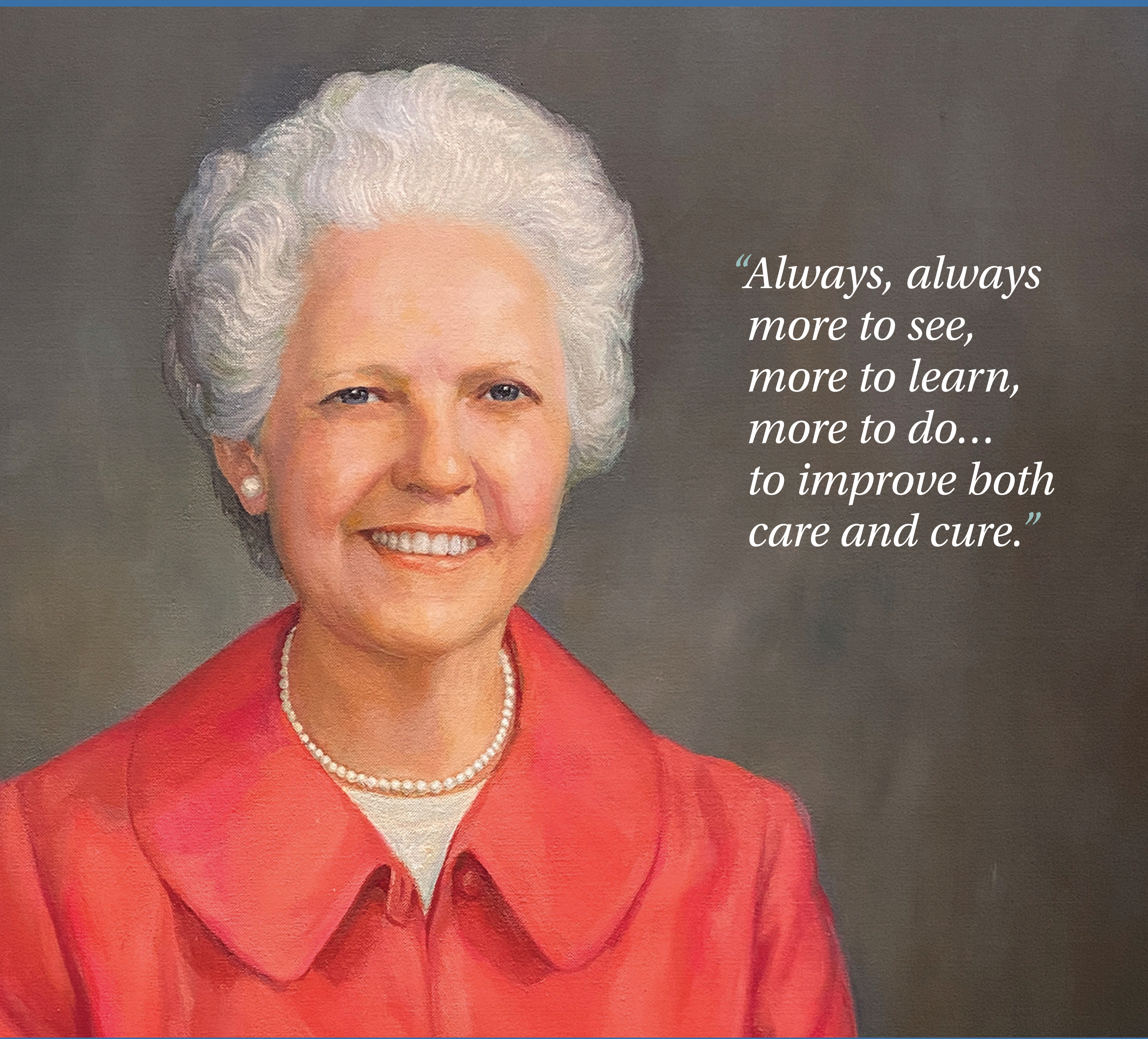
CREATING A TRUE PROFESSION

Ruth Sleeper is often credited with professionalizing nursing. She was a member of dozens of nursing organizations and served as president of the National League of Nursing Education, and later was appointed the first president of the National League of Nursing. She participated in many international nursing organizations as well. From 1947 to 1961 she was chair of the Education Committee of the International Council of Nursing, and was an active member of the Commission on the Status of Women at the Meeting of Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.

President Eisenhower presents his pen to Ruth Sleeper after he declares National Nurse Week in 1954.

Photo: National League for Nursing Collection, Barbara Bates Center for The Study of The History of Nursing, University of Pennsylvania

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*“Always, always
more to see,
more to learn,
more to do...
to improve both
care and cure.”*

HONORING A LEADER

In recognition of her stalwart dedication to her students as well as her lasting impact on nursing practice, the Trustees Room foyer on the second floor of the Bulfinch Building will be renamed the Ruth Sleeper Suite. Following the foyer’s rededication in June, visitors are welcome to visit the space where her portrait holds a place of honor.

*Ruth Sleeper, RN, BS, MA
(1899 to 1992); Assistant
Superintendent, MGH
Nursing Services/Principal,
MGH School of Nursing
(1933 to 1946); Director,
MGH Nursing Service/
MGH School of Nursing
(1946 to 1966)*

Portrait by Arthur Pyykko, 1973.
Photo: Massachusetts General
Hospital