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## Nurses want more accurate portrayal on 'ER' TV show

By Michelle Rester  
STAFF WRITER

The NBC nighttime hit "ER" isn't helping the nursing shortage, according to nurses nationwide who have inundated the show's producers with letters asking that they stop portraying them in an inaccurate light.

At a time when hospitals are stepping over themselves to offer new cars and tens of thousands of dollars in sign-on bonuses to fill a looming nurse-to-patient ratio that takes effect Jan. 1, it would help recruiting efforts if the most influential health-care show on television portrayed a true account of the nursing profession, said Sandy Summers, executive director of the Center for Nursing Advocacy.

"They portray us as knowing nothing handmaidens who blindly follow without questioning the heroic physicians," Summers said.

What the show gets wrong, it is actually nurses, not doctors, who use defibrillators to shock a patient's heart to start beating, and nurses — not doctors — rush to the ambulances to bring in the patients and start the life-saving treatments such as intubation, she said.

"That could really attract droves of 16-year-old high school students into nursing if they could see what sexy and powerful treatments nurses can use, and

how it takes someone with knowledge and skill to become a nurse," Summers said.

The Maryland-based organization that Summers founded two years ago has launched the letter-writing campaign. More than 800 nurses have filed complaints against the show within the last month, including some from the San Gabriel Valley, Summers said.

A spokesman for Warner Bros. Television, which produces "ER," could only speak on background and had nothing to say about the story lines of character nurses. He offered the following written statement.

"Over the past 10 seasons, the series has been acknowledged by the medical community for its positive contributions. The series will continue to do its best to entertain TV audiences, while bringing to light the important work of doctors and nurses."

Genevieve Clavreul, a registered nurse from Pasadena, is one of the many letter writers. She said she is disappointed that a month has passed since she mailed her complaint and she has yet to receive a response.

"It ('ER') has been for many, many years such a misrepresentation of what nurses do," said Clavreul, who among other things once taught emergency room nursing. "If a nurse gives medication that a doctor has prescribed, she is legally responsible if the dosage the doctor pre-



Photo courtesy WARNER BROS./NBC

**ACTORS** Maura Tierney and James Belushi appear in the TV show "ER." A nursing advocacy group objects to the way the nursing profession is portrayed on the show.

scribed is wrong, not the doctor." Clavreul praised the Center for Nursing Advocacy for attempting to change the image of nurses, especially in light of a crucial nursing shortage. They are the true patient advocates, morally and legally, she said.

"It is the only way to recruit more nurses," she said. "I'm not saying to glorify nurses, but show the good and the bad, both male and female nurse models. Young people watch TV and get ideas of careers from doing that." Members of the Center for Nursing Advocacy say they had a conference call with "ER" executives about two years ago, with little result. They were able to get a statement removed from an "ER" Web site that said the character Abby had been demoted from a medical student to a nurse.

Summers and others had taken offense to the statement because nurses have more education, training and experience than young medical students. The group is expected to talk with the show's officials again soon, but the studio has yet to commit to a date, Summers said.

Clavreul, who is also working through a nurse registry to do undercover research about nursing in the San Gabriel Valley, believes part of the problem is that most nurses don't belong to an association that can be their voice and defend their profession.

She is in the early stages of creating such an organization, which will be called the National Registered Nurse Professional Association.

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