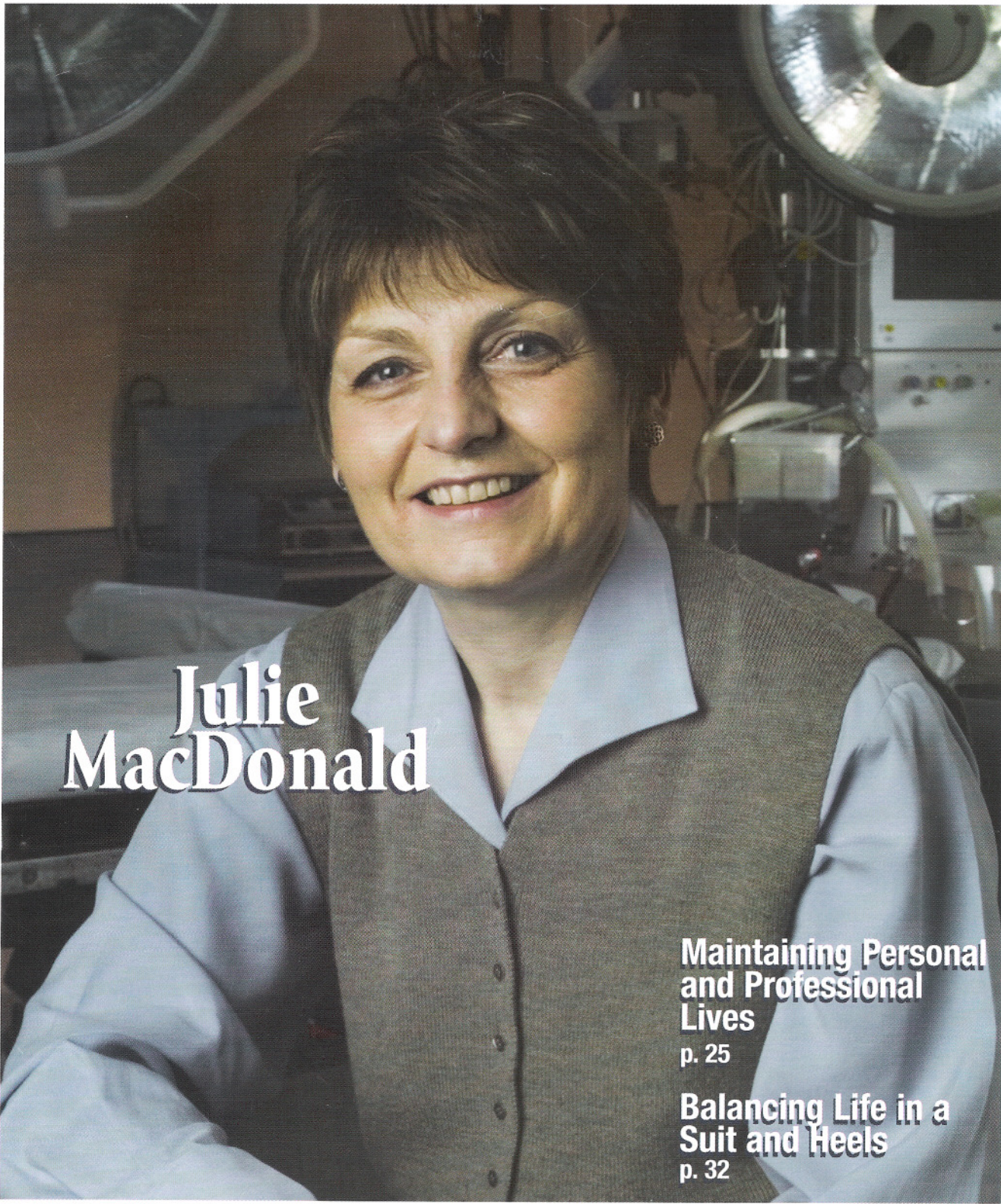


April 2004

Nurse LEADER

FROM MANAGEMENT TO LEADERSHIP

www.nurseleader.com



**Julie
MacDonald**

**Maintaining Personal
and Professional
Lives**

p. 25

**Balancing Life in a
Suit and Heels**

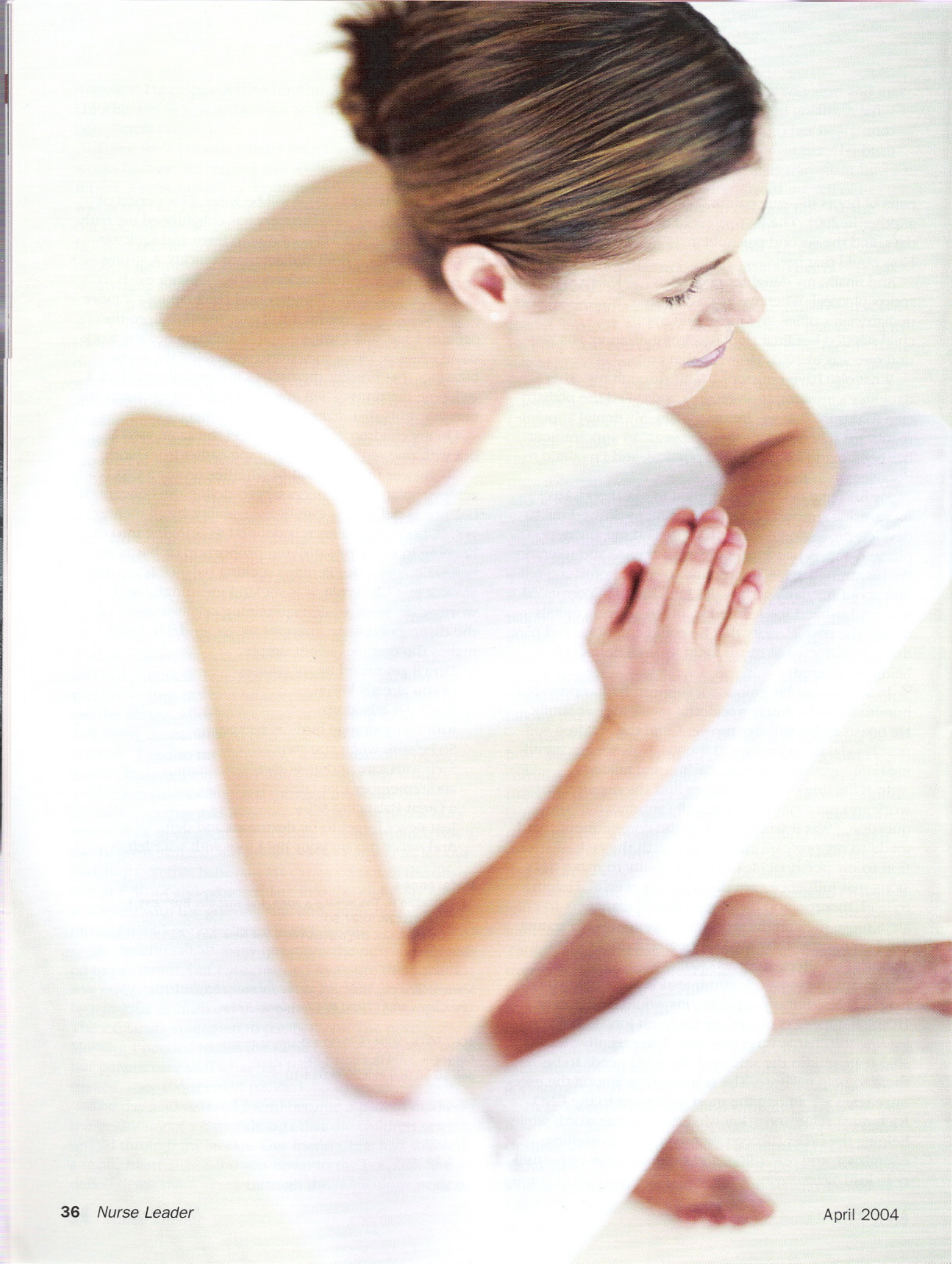
p. 32

Official publication of



The American Organization of Nurse Executives

M Mosby



Striving for Balance

Phil Lawson and Leslie William,
RN, MN

If you do a search for the word *balance* on a popular bookseller's Web site, you will find more than 3200 titles incorporating it, everything from balancing power to balancing your diet.

Clearly we have great deal of interest in achieving it. But I will venture a guess that most of us who strive for balance in our personal lives or organizations are unable to achieve it, let alone sustain it, because we have outgrown the word entirely.

The Latin definition of balance means "a pair of scales." When we strive to equal out this or that, we limit our options for surviving and thriving in a chaotic world. Our lives are colored with uncertainty and complexity.

A Thing of the Past?

Despite attempts at control, we are affected by outside circumstances almost daily. Did 9/11 have any impact on your life? How about the bursting of the Internet bubble and economic downturn? Have you or your mate lost your job in recent months or experienced something as unexpected as falling in the bathtub? In November, someone in China got atypical pneumonia, and by March the World Health Organization issued a global alert about SARS. What about forces of nature like blizzards, hurricanes, and tornadoes?

The world in which we live is interconnected, interdependent, chaotic, complex, and self-organizing. It's time to shelve the word balance—a one-size fits all concept—and explore new ways to achieve productivity and a sense of purpose.

IF NOT BALANCE, WHAT?

Instead of chasing the elusive two-sided state of balance, let's consider the characteristics of flexibility, adaptability, and "responsibility." For these traits we will use

the acronym FAR. Are these really essential qualities for success in the 21st century? We believe so, and you are more accustomed to them than you realize.

If you need a visual representation, let's imagine a mobile toy that hangs above a child's bed. If you move one dangling figure, all of them start to bob around. It is almost impossible to get them to stop, but the beauty is in their movement. Now let's apply that principal to everyday life.

For example, if your child gets the flu, isn't flexibility an essential quality? You may change your work schedule and work from home. Or you may get someone at the office to cover for you. Your mate may help share the load. All of it requires flexibility on the part of yourself, family members, and coworkers to respond appropriately. If you lose your job, you can add adaptability to the list when you are forced to live on less income and adapt to a different lifestyle or move to a new location where employment opportunities are available. Finally, as health care professionals, you know intimately the

need for responsibility and timely and appropriate responsiveness in a number of patient scenarios.

Before manifesting all three characteristics of FAR, a health care practitioner must assess a patient's needs, expectations, attitudes, and responsibilities. We will use the acronym NEAR to describe those results. As a simple way to remember both, we'll say you must see NEAR to go FAR.

See how the word balance has slipped from the vocabulary? Flexibility, adaptability, and responsibility emerge when we no longer force our circumstances to equal this or that but rather live our lives more spherically. We call that being spherical. This perspective may appear too freeform for those who need a well-defined 10-step program to wrap their minds around, but try and let the concepts sink in for a moment. You don't have to force them; they are pretty natural, really. And it's not that hard to improve the qualities of FAR from this point forward. It just takes a little practice.

BEEN THERE. DONE THAT—PHIL

When we stop trying to fix things, reach a perfect balance, and to fight chaos rather embrace it, the world becomes our playground for new opportunities.

you that I experienced the early 1990s, during ment became a thing o isolate the one thing th help them achieve stab dictable world. They be computer system, the r duction process, all wo

All has not been wel

So what's the proble mat our mindset when we realize that the com not be frightening. In

some
beca
G
lent.
side
whe
dow
alter
F
whe
man