

Impelled by Our Experiences: Nursing History in the Curriculum

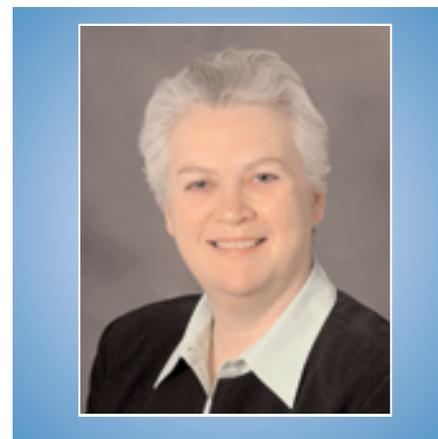
Mary P. Tarbox, EdD, RN

Today, as I do every day, I walked through the halls of the Department of Nursing and passed the pictures of 38 classes that have graduated from this program. When I take a turn into the "Heritage Room," I encounter the pictures of 67 classes that completed the diploma program at the initial School of Nursing from 1904 until 1971 and set the standard for nursing education by the Sisters of Mercy in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. All these faces – all these nurses and the patients that they have assisted – lead me ponder the impact that this educational program and others like it across the country have had on the health of the population of this city, this state, and this nation.

As one who has formally studied nursing history, I find these pictures to be essential in identifying and recording those who have gone before us and paved the way for the extraordinary work of today's professional nurses. Imagine what one's experience may have been like in 1904. Imagine not only the stringent rules and regulations of early educational programs, but also imagine caring for patients in pain when there were few analgesics available, and for those with infections while not having antibiotics. What could be done for the patient with seizures or the child with diabetes? What did nurses do? What were their interventions? Did they evaluate outcomes? Of course they intervened and paid attention to outcomes; they may have used different language, but they were critical thinkers who paid particular attention to the impact of their actions on patients and families.

In a 1914 edition of Dock's *Materia Medica for Nurses*, particular attention is given to the classification, preparation, and administration of "medicines" for nurses. The text is meant for nursing students and includes the "source and composition of drugs; their physiological actions; signs indicating their favorable and unfavorable results, the symptoms of poisons, with their antidotes; and practical points on administration" (Dock, 1914, p. v). Through the provision of this information, Dock felt "...impelled by experience of many years to remind nurses of the subtle dangers of many potent remedies with which they are entrusted..." (Dock, 1914, p. iv). Such information was required at the time and was only the beginning of what would become instruction for one of the most crucial interventions of the professional nurse. Even a century ago, nurses were quite aware of their responsibilities and the trust that the patients bestowed upon them. As the most trusted professionals in the country today, nurses continue to be cautious in the administration of medications and observant of patients' responses.

Admonitions by early nurse educators that nursing students must be vigilant and thoughtful laid the groundwork of the current *National Patient Safety Goals*, which keep us all observant and evaluative of the patient care offered today (Joint Commission, 2008). Such goals are necessary in a world of complex, technological treatments for patients. However, they are no more important to the safety and trust of the patient than they were in 1914!



One need not go back in history nearly 100 years to find interventions that pale in the light of the complexity of patient care in today's world. As a graduate of nursing education in the 1970s, my instructors were *impelled by their experiences* to admonish their nursing students with cautions about contaminating hypodermic needles as we attached them to syringes (sometimes glass syringes) and to make sure that we calculated the IV drip as ordered (without the use of pumps). Many will remember the clinical opportunities to work with the patient who was ten days post-cholecystectomy, or the new mother who was ready

Mary P. Tarbox, EdD, RN, is Chair, Department of Nursing, Mount Mercy College, Cedar Rapids, IA. Dr. Tarbox is a graduate of Teachers College Columbia University and has been a supporter of the National Student Nurses' Association since her student days when she served as an Iowa Association of Nursing Students Board member. Mount Mercy College is a Total School Member of NSNA with 229 NSNA active members. Dr. Tarbox is a member of the 2009-2010 *Dean's Notes* Advisory Board.

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to go home after one week. Blood sugars were determined by urine tests; rectal temperatures were the standard for all children and patients unable to hold an oral thermometer for the designated time of 5 to 8 minutes! Such memories do not lead one to wish for those days, only to recall that nursing practice is a dynamic force that must be recognized for its intricacy and intimacy and to know that nurses are trusted by the patients to do for them what “they would do for themselves if they had the necessary strength, will or knowledge” (Harmer & Nite, 1978, p. 14).

If we share these observations with students today, their eyes roll and their lips curl. They send text messages to their classmates to see if they, too, think the professor is off on one of those tangents again. History may have little relevance to students as they struggle with their multiple roles, tasks, and responsibilities. They want to learn what they need to know, to perform the tasks that they see other nurses doing, and they want instruction in a format that will allow them to still “have a life” outside of nursing. Why muddle their thinking with stories from the past that mean so little to them today?

Why? Because the past teaches us who we are, where we have been, and where we are going! Professional nursing practice today is founded on the work of those nurses from the past. There was no more obvious evidence of this than when, during a recent visit to a new tower built for pediatric patients, I learned of the “research” that influenced the design and function of the space and equipment for each patient’s room. Natural lighting, noise reduction, air flow and filtration, and easy access to water for cleaning and elimination were all incorporated into the new design, based on the findings of nursing research and patient responses. One might find it interesting that the five “Rules of a Healthy House” as written by Florence Nightingale in 1860 included: pure air, pure water, efficient drainage, cleanliness, and light. Nightingale knew from experience and observation what seemed to

be most beneficial to the patient. Modern nursing research, based on scientific principles and current practice questions, confirms experiences and observations of the past and maintains the evidence of outcomes that continue to be beneficial to patients.

So I wonder if students and faculty are fully aware of the value of teaching nursing history in the curriculum. I believe that nursing history confronts us every day in our teaching, although we may not have planned it. Those stories we tell students about our past experiences with a particular patient or the rationale and evidence for a particular intervention all give our teaching a foundation in history. The students may not recognize the “history” in our stories, but they do seem to listen (even with rolling eyes) and remember when faculty speak of experiences that shaped their practice.

It would be terrific to see a full course on nursing history in every program, just as it would be terrific to have a whole course in legal and ethical issues, genomics and transcultural nursing, and many other areas of value and interest to nurses. By recognizing that such a history course is unlikely to find a place in most curricula, faculty are impelled by experience to remind their students of those who went before them and to appreciate what they did, why they did it, and why we do it today and will do it tomorrow.

Thus, as I pass the pictures in the hall, I reflect on a century of nursing education in our community through this institution. I ponder the teaching and learning experiences and the practice of nearly 4,000 graduates. They have practices in countless settings, for people of all ages and backgrounds. They represent a diverse group of women and men who are or have been careful observers and practitioners, who instill trust in their patients and recognize the outcomes of their efforts. They are aware of their heritage and the work of those who have preceded them – usually after they have experienced some of the intricacy and intimacy of their professional practice. Our goal is to assure that the next

4,000 graduates maintain their awareness and commitment and carry on the tradition of thoughtful, cautious, and compassionate care. **DN**

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Resources

Additional information to share with your students on nursing history and nursing history in the curriculum is available through links found on the NSNA Web site (www.nсна.org/faculty/resources.asp), which includes:

- **American Association for the History of Nursing**
<http://www.aahn.org>
- **Barbara Bates Center for The Study of The History of Nursing**
University of Pennsylvania, School of Nursing
<http://www.nursing.upenn.edu/history/default.htm>
- **The Center for Nursing Historical Inquiry**
University of Virginia, School of Nursing
<http://nursing.virginia.edu/research/cnhi/>
- **Center for Nursing History**
University of Wisconsin
Milwaukee School of Nursing
http://www4.uwm.edu/nursing/centers/nursing_history.cfm
- **The Midwest Nursing History Resource Center**
University of Illinois, Chicago, College of Nursing
<http://www.uic.edu/nursing/ghlo/resourcecenter/index.shtml>
- **Florence Nightingale Museum**
London, England
<http://www.florence-nightingale.co.uk>

For additional information about nursing history in the curriculum and to share ideas, contact:

Mary Tarbox, EdD, RN
Chair, Department of Nursing
Mount Mercy College
1330 Elmhurst Drive NE
Cedar Rapids, IA 52402
mtarbox@mtmercy.edu

The Virginia Henderson International Nursing Library and the International Academic Nursing Alliance: Free Resources for Faculty and Students

Carol J. Huston, MSN, DPA, FAAN

In 1985, the Honor Society of Nursing, Sigma Theta Tau International (STTI) received a grant from Lilly Endowment, Inc. to explore the development of a Center for Nursing Scholarship with a computerized library in Indianapolis, Indiana. The library became a reality in December 1990, when Virginia Henderson gave her approval for the electronic library to be named in her honor. The nursing resources developed for the Virginia Henderson International Nursing Library (VHINL) moved to the Internet in 1995, through funding from the Helene Fuld Health Trust. In 2000, Miss Ruth Lilly gave STTI additional funding so the VHINL would be accessible to all at no charge and created an endowment for continued support of the library. As a result of this ongoing support, the VHINL has grown significantly over the past 8 years.

Currently, over 33,000 searchable research studies, conference abstracts, evidence-based projects, and Doctor of Nursing Practice projects are available in the library (which can be accessed online at <http://www.nursinglibrary.org/portal/main.aspx>) and new contributions are added regularly. Unlike Medline® or university libraries, much of the research posted in the VHINL has not been published in journals and is not available in any other collection. Users of the VHINL also have access to the contact information of contributing authors and primary investigators to ask questions, seek possible future collaborations, or to request full-text versions of their studies. There is no charge to access this electronic repository. In addition, STTI Librarian Margie Wilson is available to help faculty and students complete their searches by email

(librarymanager@nursinglibrary.org) or by phone (317-634-8171 or toll free at 888-634-7575).

In addition, in 2007, The American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC) and STTI partnered to house information about practice innovation at Magnet-recognized health care facilities in the library. The honor society also collaborates with 11 other organizations to post their annual conference and congress abstracts, including the ANCC National Magnet Conference and the Council for the Advancement of Nursing Science (CANS), State of the Science meeting. The library also provides access to the *Essential Nursing Competencies and Curricula Guidelines for Genetics and Genomics* and includes links for evidence-based practice, grants and funding sources, and general nursing resources.

Please consider this an invitation for you, your faculty, and your students to not only access and use materials from the VHINL, but also to share your research and clinical projects with other VHINL users. A streamlined submission form is available for use (<http://www.nursinglibrary.org/portal/main.aspx?PageID=4004&Target=4012>).

STTI is also home to the International Academic Nursing Alliance (IANA) (<http://www.nursingalliance.org/portal/main.aspx>). IANA is a free global electronic community that allows nurse educators and clinicians to have an electronic alliance with other nurse educators and clinicians to advance scholarship, collaboration, exchanges, support and dissemination of nursing knowledge. As such, IANA matches users up with information, resources, and oppor-

tunities with those who seek information, resources, and opportunities in the areas of faculty exchanges, student exchanges, placements for sabbaticals or visiting professorships, mentors for faculty, mentors for students, available nursing faculty positions, innovative program ideas, potential research collaborations, and examples of evidence-based nursing principles, experiences, content or research.

Perhaps most importantly, IANA allows nursing school faculty worldwide to access an extensive range of educational resources. Prior to IANA's inception in 1999, no system existed to link the health care knowledge of the world's nursing education institutions. Currently, over 100 schools have contributed resources to the IANA database. Contributing to the database is simple and the database is only as good as the information which populates it. To add your school, please contact Teresa Ransdell by email (teresa@stti.iupui.edu) or phone (toll free at 888-634-7575). Help make IANA become an even more vital resource for global knowledge exchange! **DN**

Carol J. Huston, MSN, DPA, FAAN, is the President, Honor Society of Nursing, Sigma Theta Tau International.

Faculty Are Invited:

Come Join Us for the 2009 MidYear Conference in Phoenix, October 29-November 1, 2009

- NSNA Leadership University Advisors and Consultants Certificate Program
- Pre-Conference Faculty Workshop, co-sponsored with the National League for Nursing (tentative)

More to come! Check our Web site (www.nсна.org/faculty/resources.asp) regularly for more information and updates. **DN**



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Happy Nurses Week from NSNA and *Dean's Notes*! May 6-12, 2009

Celebrate May 8th: National Student Nurses Day

National Nurses Day, also known as National RN Recognition Day, is always celebrated on May 6th and begins National Nurses Week, which runs until May 12th (the birth date of Florence Nightingale).

National Nurses Week is one of the nation's largest health care events, recognizing the contributions and commitments nurses make and educating the public about the significant work they perform. The history of Nurses Day can be traced back to 1953, when Dorothy Sutherland of the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare sent a proposal to President Eisenhower to proclaim a "Nurse Day" in October of the following year. The proclamation was never made, but the following year National Nurses Week was observed from October 11-16, marking the 100th anniversary of Florence Nightingale's mission to Crimea.

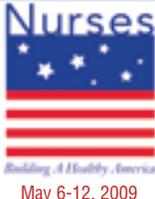
In 1974, President Nixon proclaimed a "National Nurse Week." In 1981, a resolution was initiated by nurses in New

Mexico to have May 6th declared "National Recognition Day for Nurses." This proposal was promoted by the American Nurses Association (ANA) Board of Directors and in 1982, with a joint resolution, the United States Congress designated May 6th to be "National Recognition Day for Nurses." The proposal was signed by President Reagan, making May 6 the official "National Recognition Day for Nurses." It was later expanded by the ANA Board of Directors in 1990 to a week-long celebration (May 6-12) known as "National Nurses Week."

National *Student Nurses Day* is celebrated each year on May 8th. At the request of the National Student Nurses Association (NSNA), the ANA Board of Directors designated May 8th as National Student Nurses Day beginning in 1998. And as of 2003, the ANA has declared that National *School Nurse Day* is celebrated on the Wednesday within National Nurses Week.

International Nurses Day is celebrated around the world on May 12th of each year. The International Council of Nurses (ICN) commemorates this day each year with the production and distribution of the International Nurses Day Kit, which includes educational and public information materials for use by nurses everywhere. The ICN has celebrated International Nurses Day since 1965. **DN**

Source: Adapted from Calendar Updates, via www.calendar-updates.com.



Dean's Notes extends its sincere thanks for your advocacy and mentoring of today's nursing students. Your support of their leadership development that occurs through NSNA activities at the school chapter, state association, and national level helps create tomorrow's nurse leaders.

Happy Nurses Week!