

Book Review

Rural Nursing: Aspects of Practice

Edited by Jean Ross

Dunedin, New Zealand: Rural Health Opportunities, 2008, 258 pp.

ISBN 978-0-473-13351-1

Reviewed by Mary Ellen Andrews

I was honoured to be asked to review this book by Jean Ross, who is an exceptionally well regarded supporter of rural nursing education and practice in New Zealand. The publication of this work is an example of her ongoing commitment to dissemination of knowledge about rural nursing. She has been a teacher, mentor, and colleague to many of the book's contributors, and is one of a small number of authors who endeavour to share the advancement of locally discovered rural nursing knowledge internationally.

Rural Nursing: Aspects of Practice is a collection of scholarly papers based on research conducted by master's of nursing students in New Zealand. It takes a novel approach to the dissemination of knowledge produced in graduate nursing programs and does so in a manner that is accessible, in language and content, to both practitioners and scholars. The primary theme throughout the collection is the *context of rural nursing practice*. I think most researchers would agree with Ross's assertion that rural nursing is shaped by the context of practice and that the context of practice consists of a set of diverse, interrelated elements: the people and culture, the health-care agency and nursing roles, and the geography and economy of the community.

The challenges entailed in defining the context of rural nursing practice include the debate on how to define "rural" and the economics of health-system disparities between rural and urban. The book aptly begins by discussing these issues. However, in contrast to some of the current perspectives on how to define rural, the view expressed in this book is that a consensus definition is not possible. The authors suggest that the diversity of rural settings would be negated by a generic definition and that distinguishing between rural and urban would hinder the development of collaboration for the purpose of achieving comparable health services.

Three subject areas addressed in *Rural Nursing* make it an important book for nurse researchers, health-care administrators, and nurse practitioners who focus on rural nursing practice. The first is the well-

developed presentation of a contextual framework for rural nursing practice: the Rural Framework Wheel. The value of this framework is its system approach of categorizing concepts by describing the context of rural nursing practice from ecological, health, occupational, and socio-cultural perspectives. The model integrates salient issues reported in the international rural nursing literature, such as recruitment and retention, personal and professional boundaries in nursing practice, and the need for nurses to grasp the importance of collaboration for the successful delivery of community-focused rural primary care.

Second, the book will be of interest to scholars, as it presents studies that employ a wide variety of research methods. Of interest to me was the use of storytelling as a means of reflective critical analysis of rural nursing practice. Although we often use interview methods that allow rural nurses to tell their story about rural nursing issues, the interview format does not permit in-depth critical reflection on all aspects of practice. The two chapters on storytelling as a method for sharing practice knowledge illustrate how this type of analysis can facilitate the exploration of concepts in rural nursing practice and lead to additional research questions.

Lastly, the book enhances our understanding of rural nursing practice, adding to the dialogue on rural nursing and rural health services. This collection of papers does not merely explore the dissimilarities and similarities in rural and urban nursing practice. It illustrates the potential for new and compelling nursing research, describing exciting advancements in rural nursing practice and health-care delivery and fostering a new appreciation for rural innovation. The studies described here offer a unique perspective on collaboration between researchers and practitioners through the development of programs that increase access to traditionally urban-based services within rural communities. The innovations presented include evaluation and implementation research on a mobile surgical unit, a resuscitation-education program, and a rural-based triage telephone information line that sits in contrast to the standard urban-based health information lines used for rural communities.

The book concludes with three chapters that look at the future of rural nursing practice. These chapters describe the challenges that lie ahead for the development of the rural nurse practitioner role, interdisciplinary practice models, and collaborative practice arrangements. Although the authors are writing in the context of nursing practice in New Zealand, similarities can be drawn between the challenges presented and those facing us in Canada. For example, similar to the situation in New Zealand, Canadian NP education programs and practice roles in health care are at different developmental stages across the country. These final chapters also discuss the concept of career pathways for rural nurses,

the limited diversity of career paths from a rural perspective, and the need for continuing education in the field of rural nursing.

There are few textbooks that document the practice of rural nursing and address the diversity of practice innovations in rural settings. This collection edited by Jean Ross makes a valuable contribution to rural nursing knowledge and theory development. It also highlights the breadth and depth of rural nursing research produced in New Zealand.

In reviewing the book I became optimistic about the rich store of rural nursing knowledge yet to be discovered and the great potential for innovation in rural health services. It has always been my view that the many innovative programs developed in rural Canada have not received their due in our rural nursing literature. Maybe the time has come for Canadian rural nursing researchers to publish a text with a focus on our own Canadian context and to share our knowledge about and innovations in rural nursing practice and health services.

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