

Plaudits & Gripes

The stated policy of assigning low priority to historical research (Spring/Printemps, 1993) confirms what some of us interested in nursing history have long suspected. We are aware of a number of nurse historians who have had papers rejected by your journal. In fact, a quick perusal of past issues indicates that only three papers remotely related to historical research have been published. This is an extremely short-sighted policy and somewhat ironic given your historical speculation in the past three editorials.

We cannot understand the present and plan for the future unless we have some awareness of how the past took shape. This is a message which all nurses engaged in research, clinical practice, or policy making must heed as we take part in reforming health services. The study of history has another value for nurses, that of learning the skills of analysis.

As you are aware, it is difficult to change that which we know. It is impossible to change that which we do not understand. Nurses responsible for the future directions of our profession cannot make informed decisions if they do not have access to the information of the past; why certain decisions were made, what the meaning of those decisions has been, what strategies were successful and which not, and why. Here are some historical questions which might be helpful for you in embarking upon the editorship of *The Canadian Journal of Nursing Research*. What particular events or conditions coalesced to enable the launching the journal? What was the publishing policy of the journal during the beginning years? Why and how was that policy determined? What forces have influenced change?

It would seem to us that the policy of the journal, laid out by Elizabeth Logan in the first issue, is still relevant. To a certain extent, the launching of the journal represented a definitive shift which occurred during the 1960s in which nursing's intellectual foundations finally settled in the biological and social sciences. From the 1960s on we heard little about "the art of nursing." Although not directly stated, it was anticipated by the founders that the journal would give university nurse researchers a forum to develop nursing knowledge (language) in "hard," value-free, objective scientific research. Nurse-researchers, usually far from the clinical setting, would determine the practices which nurses working with clients were expected to follow. A second intention was that by adopting the language of science nurse researchers could help other health professionals better understand nursing.

Last year marked the 350th anniversary of the arrival of the first nurse, Jeanne Mance, in Canada. To a certain extent that represents 350 years of organized nursing. Nineteen hundred and ninety-three marks the 100th anniversary of the first formal meeting of nurses held at the Chicago World's

Fair. This gathering is the root of our present national and international nursing organizations – ICN, CNA and later CAUSN. Canadian nurses, such as Isabel Hampton Robb, Adalaide Nutting and Mary Agnes Snively, to name a few, played leadership roles during the early years of those organizations, generating ideas which influence us even today (Hamilton, 1994). During the next five years the VON (1897) will mark 100 years of service to the public, the *Canadian Nurse* (1905) will mark 90 years of service to nurses, and the 75th anniversary of six university schools of nursing – British Columbia (1919), Dalhousie, McGill, Toronto, Western, Alberta (1920) – will be celebrated. Owing to the lack of recognition we have given to our history the contribution of these institutions goes unknown. All these events provide an opportunity for historical reflection and critical analysis of our past.

The point we would like to make is that your practice of paying low priority to historical research is denying your readership access to valuable nursing knowledge. We assume that your readership includes the leading researchers, academics, and policy makers of Canadian nursing. They are at a grave disadvantage in making decisions which will affect the whole profession when they are unaware of the forces – within and outside of nursing – which have influenced our present nursing culture. Clinical nurse researchers who are not introduced to critical and historical analysis of the cultural traditions which inform their research, who are unaware of the subconscious biases they bring to that research, will ultimately fail to advance our knowledge. An understanding of the historical perspective will allow nurses to broaden their perspectives, to assess the constraints and opportunities under which past decisions were made, and to recognize that professional nursing continues to evolve as nurses work with clients to promote the health of our society.

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References

Hamilton, D. (1994). Constructing the mind of nursing. *Nursing Historical Review*, 2, 3-28.

Note From the Editor:

It is indeed unfortunate that the policy regarding historical research, as set forth in my editorial *Setting New Directions and Meeting Old Challenges* (Spring 1993) was taken out of context and misinterpreted. To reiterate the policy, the *CJNR* publishes research and theoretical articles on a broad range of topics including historical research. Given that the majority of readers look to the journal for clinical research articles, premium will be given to clinical research. That is not to say that historical research is unimportant but rather,

the policy reflects the expressed interests of its subscribers. The paucity of historical articles in recent issues is regrettable but it is not due to the reasons set forth in the letter. Historical research manuscripts are subjected to the same peer review process as are other manuscripts. Thus, manuscripts dealing with a historical topic have been sent to other nurse-historians. Decisions were based on their recommendations. Authors were invited to revise along the lines suggested by their peers but, for whatever reason, chose not to resubmit. This situation is regrettable and represents a tremendous loss both to scholars and to our readership. I welcome and invite our fellow historians to submit articles to the *Canadian Journal of Nursing Research*. Let me assure fellow historians, your scholarship is welcomed and sorely needed.



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