

## *Happenings*

### **History of Nursing in British Columbia Captured on Tape**

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The Oral History Committee (1992) is a permanent subcommittee of the British Columbia (B.C.) History of Nursing Professional Practice Group of the Registered Nurses Association of B.C. (RNABC). The project was established in 1981 to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the RNABC. The goal was to capture past and present stories and activities of nurses of the province, and to document the development of nursing as we know it today. We have a rich heritage to explore and one of the methods chosen for recording our heritage was through the medium of the tape recorder.

Under the direction of Mary Nicol, a group of volunteers was trained in oral interview techniques. The original group completed 140 interviews. These audiotaped histories are on file and available through the RNABC library. Since the completion of the original anniversary project in 1988, the on-going committee of the B.C. History Group has added another ten audiotaped histories to the collection. The tapes are now accessible through RNABC's computerized library catalogue (Andrews, 1992). Computerized access allows members to search specific historical topics in the audiotape collection and to retrieve those items along with related print materials out of the library's book collection.

Joan Andrews (1992), RNABC librarian, has summarized the content of the tapes as follows:

The recollections of these nurses are rich with meaningful stories about nursing's influence on health care in the 20th century. The subject matter is vast. Topics covered include nurses' early education and working conditions, nursing during both world wars, the evolution of the local Victorian Nurses, how the Depression of the '30s affected health care, private duty nursing, collective bargaining, formation of RNABC chapters, nursing native people in the province, men in nursing, and the poliomyelitis epidemic of the 1950s. (p. 33)

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The work of the B.C. history group continues to build a bank of historical audiotapes and data. The current criteria for selection of a nurse for an oral history recording has been identified by the Oral History Committee (1992) as follows:

1. A nurse whose basic nursing education took place in B.C.
2. A nurse who graduated elsewhere but had nursing experience in B.C.
3. A nurse who has significant and interesting topics to relate about nursing in Canada and/or abroad.

The Biographical Committee (1993) of the B.C. History Group has developed a biographical summary form that now accompanies the oral audiotape. The summary asks the nurses to give biographical data and to identify major influences and mentors throughout their nursing careers. Biographical summaries are being sought from nurses currently practising in B.C. An effort is being made, if possible, to obtain biographical summaries from nurses with oral history audiotapes in the RNABC collection. These summaries are maintained and made available through a special file in the RNABC library.

Andrews (1992) identifies the goal of the efforts of B.C. nurses in attempting to capture their history:

No matter how B.C. nurses view their past, it is their history in the making – at the local level – that the Oral History Project attempts to capture for posterity. RNABC members are welcome to examine their professional roots, particularly those that have been established here in B.C. during this century. Much of that history is not in print, but it is recorded and available through RNABC's Helen Randal Library. (p. 33)

### References

- Andrews, J. (1992). Wealth of nursing history on tape. *Nursing B.C.*, 24 (91), 33.
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