

EDITORIAL

The Quality of Student Papers Augurs Well for the Future of Nursing Research

The most challenging and yet undoubtedly most enjoyable part of my job as editor of *CJNR* is putting together an issue of the Journal. Close to 40 issues after my first, I still have a feeling of exhilaration when I'm handed the finished product. I inevitably marvel at how it came to be. Each issue somehow acquires its own flavour even though we follow a similar procedure in crafting every one. There are many factors that affect how an issue takes shape, such as the quality and type of manuscripts received, the state of knowledge in a particular area, funding opportunities, and the talents and resources of our guest editors and reviewers. Against this backdrop we select manuscripts that are both timely and clinically relevant and that meet the highest standards of scholarship.

In putting together this issue devoted to completed student research projects, we followed the same process and the same criteria. Yet I have a heightened sense of exhilaration as we put the finishing touches on this issue of the Journal.

The idea of dedicating an entire issue of *CJNR*, or a special section in each issue, to student research had been tossed around for years. The opportunity presented itself when we decided to change *CJNR*'s publishing schedule (Editorial, September 2002) and to create another issue for this volume. Unfortunately — or fortunately — rescheduling meant that there would be no designated focus topic. Eureka! We decided to have an issue devoted to student research projects. The call for papers was issued in haste and with an abbreviated time frame. We were not sure what to expect.

We were heartened by the response to this call. We received many excellent submissions and, in addition, letters thanking us for the initiative. We had obviously struck a chord and were fulfilling a need among students and their advisors.

Because of the abbreviated time frame, all submissions were internally reviewed by me and by Dr. Anita Gagnon, Associate Editor. We

followed the usual protocol for reviewing and selecting manuscripts for an issue, blinded as to authorship of the manuscript. We critiqued each manuscript independently. Only after completing our own assessment did we meet to discuss the manuscripts, review our critiques, and make the first selection. We used the same criteria to assess and select these submissions as for all the manuscripts we receive: the timeliness and relevance of the topic for nursing, the conceptual and methodological appropriateness, and scientific rigour.

We were mildly surprised but delighted with the quality of the manuscripts. For the most part they were well written despite the 10-page limit we had imposed. Because of the very tight timeline from submission to publication, we allowed authors much less turn-around time than usual to respond to our suggestions and address our concerns. Those who were asked for revisions took up the challenge and, without exception, re-submitted by the requested date. This gave us time to review the re-submitted manuscripts and ask for further revision if needed. We were impressed by how these “young” scholars handled the submission, review, and re-submission process.

The 11 manuscripts published in this issue reflect some recent trends within nursing research. They cover a broad range of topics of concern to the nursing profession. It has long been accepted within the discipline and the profession that the response patterns of individuals and families to health and illness are central to nursing practice and hence nursing research. Many of the papers have this focus, but with a twist. Several of the studies examine patterned responses to health and illness in understudied sub-populations. For example, Gage and Kirk’s study focuses on first-time fathers’ preparedness for fatherhood, and Irwin, Thorne, and Varcoe examine the motherhood experience of women who have been battered. Some of the papers deal with individual and family responses to medical technology, such as Alexander, Rennick, Carnevale, and Davis’s study describing the daily struggles of living with childhood long-term technology dependence. Others examine advances in medical treatment that have transformed the way health care is delivered. For example, Lock and Willson take a look at the information needs of cancer patients receiving chemotherapy in an ambulatory-care setting. Jack, DiCenso, and Lohfeld describe nurses’ role in helping to establish a working relationship between paraprofessional home visitors and high-risk families. Another recent trend in the nursing research literature is a return to the issue of understanding nurses. After a hiatus of almost 30 years, the sorely neglected area of understanding the behaviours and attitudes of nurses is once again a subject of interest, as policy-makers and administrators need informa-

tion on how to attract individuals to nursing and how to retain them. Hopkins and Jackson examine the qualities of future nurses in terms of co-dependency or caring. Another trend that has been of concern to nursing is what constitutes culturally appropriate care and how to educate nurses and future nurses accordingly. Moffitt and Wuest's study examines different models of care within nursing education and practice in working with the indigenous population in Canada's Northwest Territories.

These manuscripts also brought home to me what can be accomplished in undergraduate and graduate projects. Such projects are usually "small" and single-authored and must be completed within a limited time frame and a limited budget. Given these parameters, student projects are best suited for pilot work (e.g., Katz and Gagnon's study examining the adequacy of postpartum care for immigrant women), systematic literature reviews (e.g., Guruge and Sidani's meta-analysis of the role of demographic characteristics in preoperative teaching outcomes), the testing of new measures or of established measures in new populations (e.g., McCormick, Naimark, and Tate's study of symptoms in patients waiting for CABS surgery), or the examination of a phenomenon that is not prevalent in the general population but is important in the lives of those people who are dealing with it. These studies are invaluable in identifying critical variables, sensitizing researchers to issues of clinical relevance, providing preliminary empirical support for theoretical ideas, and refocusing and refining questions for study. Few granting agents will invest large sums of money in the absence of preliminary data indicating the validity of the research question. These studies provide such data.

It was heartening as well to see that students are developing knowledge and skill in a wide range of methodologies. No one design predominates. In fact, the studies employed whatever method could best address the research question. This issue is highlighted in Bryanton, Gillam, and Snelgrove-Clarke's Designer's Corner article. This augurs well for the development of nursing knowledge, because nursing requires answers to many types of questions and should not restrict itself by adopting any one method.

It was also apparent from the submissions that the students were being well mentored. Mentoring is one of the most important and gratifying roles in developing the next generation of nurse researchers. The quality of the studies not only attests to the quality of students in nursing but also reflects the quality of the mentoring that they are receiving. To see students involved in their supervisor's program of

research is indeed a new and welcome development in our profession. The opportunities for mentoring have never been greater in terms of both expertise and financial support. We are grateful to Edwards, DiCenso, Degner, O'Brien-Pallas, and Lander, the first nurses to occupy CHSRF and CIHR federally funded chairs, who, in *Happenings*, outline the training opportunities available to the next generation of nurse scholars.

A wise and highly productive nurse scientist once told me that if you do not publish your study it is as if the study was never done. Unfortunately many studies, particularly those conducted by students, remain in the closet, or on library shelves, known to but a few individuals. Getting students and researchers to publish their work is the last and, for many, most difficult step in the research endeavour. Students run out of steam — and besides, they have already received their reward for completing their research in the form of a degree. Supervisors have usually gone on to mentor and guide new students. In addition, there are few avenues for publishing student projects. We are grateful that students and supervisors took the time to prepare their research studies for publication. We are delighted to have provided a vehicle for disseminating studies conducted by very promising nurse researchers.

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Editor