

GUEST EDITORIAL

Scholarship in Health Promotion: Complexity and Challenge

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Health promotion is an expanding interdisciplinary field of study and practice that is of central concern to the discipline of nursing. The papers included in this issue of the Journal speak to both recent developments in the field and nursing's contribution to them. In *CJNR's* first focus issue on health promotion, published some 7 years ago, O'Neill (1997) suggested that nursing has been on the periphery of health promotion discourse and practice and that its apparent lack of influence stems, in part, from an individualistic orientation that fails to consider the broader context in which health develops. The extent to which this perspective was valid then or is valid now is a matter of debate. However, the papers included in this focus issue of *CJNR* offer some current insights into the question.

The papers included in this issue highlight the complexity and range of interests in the field of health promotion and reflect the perspectives of authors who are situated both within and outside of nursing. Collectively, the papers address the breadth of knowledge needed to understand the *processes* by which people take control of their health and improve their quality of life (World Health Organization, 1986) as well as the practices that may be used by professionals to support these efforts. There is a decidedly ecological emphasis across these papers, and a conscious effort to consider the interactions between people and their social worlds.

Two qualitative studies included in this issue provide a glimpse into people's health experiences in the context of their everyday lives that is foundational to health promotion practice. Bottorff et al.'s analysis of the ways in which adolescents come to think about and understand nicotine addiction highlights their varied and sometimes competing explanations and raises questions about their sense of personal agency to avoid or overcome such addiction. Similarly, Ward-Griffin's feminist study of the experiences of nurses who find themselves in both professional and family caregiving roles illustrates the bind that can occur when women must constantly negotiate the boundaries of their public and private

responsibilities. The analysis and interpretation is decidedly political, challenging dualistic concepts of paid and unpaid work and private and professional obligations. Each of these studies provides a basis for developing health promotion practices that consider the reality of people's everyday lives, including those that address changes in the broader social and political systems.

The majority of papers in this issue of the *Journal* propose innovative approaches for dealing with theoretical and methodological challenges that arise from the adoption of an ecological perspective to inform health promotion research and practice. In the *Discourse* contribution, Rootman makes a compelling case for extending the field of health promotion to include literacy. His analysis of developments in this emerging field of study, including the distinction between "health literacy" and "literacy and health," is clearly articulated and should lead us to consider how nursing might contribute to this important area of knowledge development.

Drummond applies an ecological perspective to address conceptual and methodological challenges in evaluating the impact of health promotion programs focusing on healthy child development. Her work provides a practical way of conceptualizing health promotion action, suggests issues to consider in tracking the implementation of such action, and identifies critical methodological challenges that must be considered in the process.

Edwards, Mill, and Kothari provide an in-depth treatment of issues related to the design of multiple interventions in community health. Through the presentation of a research framework, the authors propose ways to address critical limitations of previous research employing multiple interventions, while providing concrete examples to illustrate how the framework can be applied to meet such challenges.

Kothari and Birch's paper extends this discussion by focusing on a key issue in multilevel research — how to deal with nested data that arise from multilevel research questions. Addressing both conceptual and analytic issues in multilevel research, their treatment of complex issues, including the use of multilevel modelling, is both clear and accessible, and illustrates the potential of this approach for disentangling the effects of individual and community level variables.

In a different vein, Purath et al. present evidence to support the implementation of a brief, tailored intervention delivered by nurse practitioners and designed to increase physical activity among sedentary working women. Findings from this study support the importance of tailoring interventions to client needs and preferences. Given that the intervention is readily adaptable to the reality of the practice setting, it is highly relevant for evidence-based health promotion practice.

It has been my pleasure to serve as editor for this fine collection of papers that reflect progressive, rigorous, and relevant scholarship. If the papers in this issue reflect the calibre of work being undertaken in nursing, there can be no question that nurses are making a significant contribution to the field of health promotion. I applaud these authors for their commitment to a field of study that has so much potential for nursing practice but, at the same time, is fraught with challenges and contradictions. I extend my thanks to Dr. Laurie Gottlieb for providing me with this opportunity. I have learned much from the experience. I am grateful to Joanna Toti for the patience and competence she has shown in assisting an editorial novice with this process from beginning to end. I particularly appreciate the assistance of all who openly accepted my request to review papers for this issue and who returned thorough reviews on time!

References

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