



Guest editorial

Nursing's disciplinary perspective: What makes the discipline unique?



World-wide, nursing is viewed as a profession and discipline essential to achieving optimal health of individuals, families, and communities. But, what makes the discipline unique? This paper will: (1) acknowledge the lack of a succinct disciplinary perspective; (2) propose a clear disciplinary perspective of nursing; and (3) suggest next steps to disseminate the perspective within the nursing population and society.

Today, fifty years after nurse scholars first referred to nursing as a discipline and envisioned its' body of unique knowledge, nurse scholars express concern that nurses lack consensus on a disciplinary perspective relevant across the globe (Willis, Grace, & Roy, 2008). Using phrases such as, at a crossroads, they warn of risks to the future of a discipline (Roy, 2018).

Nurses agree we are far more than a cadre of individuals skilled in complex, technical procedures. But, what is that far more? Ask any nurse why s/he is essential to health care and s/he will use terms like holistic, communication, relationships, and critical thinking. But, each description is slightly different. How can nurses state what is distinct about our essential contributions to health and healthcare in a way easily articulated to colleagues, employers, clients, and the general public? If nursing is a discipline, an entity within academia with a unique body of knowledge, how do nurses know what should be studied in theory and research?

At this time, the metaparadigm of nursing represents our single most widely, though not totally accepted, view of the domain of nursing. The constructs of person, health, environment, and nursing are seen as having relevance for all nurses practicing in diverse settings world-wide. But, what is it about the constructs of person, health, and environment that makes nursing unique? Cannot other health professions argue that they address these constructs in their practice as well? Moreover, the metaparadigm provides no further guidance such as a single definition of each construct. Several paradigms and multiple conceptual models, by definition, present views of the discipline.

There have been recent efforts to suggest a single disciplinary perspective but they lack broad dissemination and acceptance. In 2008, Willis, Grace, and Roy proposed a “central, unifying focus for the discipline: facilitating humanization, meaning, choice, quality of life, and healing in living and dying” (p. E28). A parallel initiative pertains to the name of the nursing discipline. Chinn and Fawcett (Fawcett et al., 2015; Nursology, 2018) have renewed early (1970s) suggestions to refer to the discipline as Nursology: “a body of knowledge, a research methodology, and a practice methodology about and for phenomena of concern to nurses” (Nursology, Definitions, para 3.). In 1997, Reed suggested renaming the discipline, citing Paterson and Zderad's (1976) term, nursology, as one option but also explaining that this move requires clarification (or even

reformulation) of the metaparadigmatic concept, *nursing*, as a unique human health process that is the shared and substantive focus of science and practice. To ensure the survival of nursing as a discipline, each nurse, in any setting of practice, must be able to understand, articulate, and practice through the lens of the disciplinary perspective.

In 2017, a Nursing Theory Think Tank was convened by Case Western Reserve University's Frances Payne Bolton School of Nursing. Eminent nurse scholars were invited to reflect on the state of philosophical and theoretical nursing knowledge fifty years after the two initial nursing theory think tanks. The scholars developed this disciplinary perspective nursing: Unitary humanenvironmenthealth processes and healing relationships. Unitary humanenvironmentalhealth processes are defined as: “The dynamic and transformative changes manifested and experienced through living and dying” and Healing Relationships as “Human environment intentions, expressions, behaviors, actions and experiences that enhance well-being” (Fitzpatrick et al., in press, para 4). The scholars also recognized diverse types of inquiry in nursing: philosophical (includes ethical and aesthetic), conceptual, theoretical, empirical, methodological, and practice-generated (Fitzpatrick et al., in press, para 5).

The articulated disciplinary perspective of nursing will be disseminated and published in early 2019. This perspective on the discipline must be widely disseminated and introduced in nursing education, clinical practice, policy development, and research. A toolkit of strategies to guide nurses in understanding the disciplinary perspective; implementing it in research and practice; and interpreting it to colleagues, patients, and the general public will facilitate this endeavor to ensure the future of the discipline of nursing.

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