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P

Psychology

for

Nurses

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N

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ANNE AND
DON BYRNE

Psychology

for

Nurses

THEORY AND
PRACTICE

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Preface

Nursing as a science and a profession has made many gains in the past decade or so. Among the most notable of these has been in education, with the transition from an apprenticeship largely under the control of nurse-educators working within the administrative setting of the hospital to tertiary training, where responsibility for the professional training of nurses has been given over to the universities. With this transition, education for nurses has broadened to include a systematic base of the biological and human sciences in addition to the more traditional practical skills training of the past. Nursing has emerged as a profession requiring higher and higher levels of technical expertise. But the practice of nursing also rests squarely with the human sciences; nursing is about people and their lifestyles, about the complex biopsychosocial reasons they become ill, and about the myriad behavioural and emotional responses they show to illness. Psychology is, therefore, a science which is central to the practice of nursing.

There is another side to nursing which is in danger of being overlooked in the present transition. Nursing is, as it always has been, a vocation as well as a profession. Evidence about entry into the profession suggests that nurses are strongly characterized by caring, concern, altruism, idealism, social awareness and a desire to alleviate suffering. They possess, in other words, the personal basis for what psychologists call the *helping relationship*. Large numbers of nurses interacting with and attending to their patients adopt, as if innately, the psychological attributes of an interpersonal relationship which we know, through research, to have enormous therapeutic potential.

Psychology for Nurses came about, then, with all this firmly in mind. The unmistakable transition in nursing education, the identified personal characteristics of those attracted to the profession of nursing, and the centrality of psychology to the broad range of tasks the nurse undertakes all pointed to the need for a textbook which addressed nursing as a helping profession and not simply a set of technical skills. There are, of course, other textbooks which present introductory psychology clearly and scientifically; they are widely used in courses on general psychology and we would not dispute their value for a minute. There are also textbooks on introductory psychology which have been expressly written for the education of trainee nurses, and these too have much to offer. In the main, however, all these texts present psychology in the same way, reviewing the theories and evidence on the classical areas of the science (learning, motivation, cognition, development, personality and so on), but doing so largely out of the applied context in the belief, it seems, that the translation of theories and evidence to the problems of real people will somehow miraculously arise from the simple presentation of the facts.

We have chosen to adopt a different approach. Rather than mirror yet again the 'archetypal' introductory text on psychology, we decided to identify those areas of psychology which are directly relevant to the practice of nursing and to the roles and well-being of the nurse within the broad context of the profession, and to focus on these. In this, we have attempted to integrate psychological theory and evidence with application, presenting sufficient of the former to provide the nurse with a clear understanding and appreciation of basic psychological principles. We have then carefully selected examples from nursing practice to illustrate these principles and demonstrate their immediate relevance to the nurse's clinical work. In this way, we have attempted to go directly to the core of psychology as a contributor to effective nursing practice.

We begin with an overview of contemporary psychological theories and evidence, using the first chapter to acquaint the nurse with the major theoretical and practical areas of psychological enquiry which are likely to have application to nursing practice. In Chapter 2, developing the view that nursing depends for its effectiveness on the establishment of a helping relationship, we seek to explore the nature of helping relationships, closely examining in particular the interpersonal skills which have been established as crucial to these. Chapter 3 extends this to a consideration of practical counselling skills for nurses. Examples of counselling within the nursing role are given, and exercises designed to establish and improve the nurse's counselling skills are presented.

In Chapter 4, the notion of stress and its relationship to the development, course and treatment of physical illness is outlined. The specific role of the nurse in the recognition and management of stress-related conditions in patients under her care is dealt with. Emotions, as psycho-

logical phenomena closely linked with stress, also bear on the development of illness and on recovery from it, and we take the view that nurses will be primary caregivers in the management of emotional reactions in their patients. Chapter 5 therefore investigates the principal human emotions and relates these specifically to the care of patients in the nursing setting.

In any helping relationship communication is central to success, and Chapter 6 explores the theories underlying effective communication, detailing specific demands for communication skills in nursing practice. The influence of person perception on human interactions in general, and on the practice of nursing in particular, together with the management of adaptive and maladaptive perceptual tendencies, is then examined in Chapter 7. Chapter 8 considers the nature of group structure and dynamics, and relates this to the specific kinds of groups which nurses might need to become involved in during the course of their professional practice. The final chapter looks at the role of psychology in the protection of the nurse herself. This chapter alerts the nurse to the prospect of burnout, to the recognition of burnout in herself and others, and to the steps which might be taken for the prevention or management of burnout.

Books presenting overviews of information, for whatever audience, are necessarily derivative. They draw not only on the original work of their authors, but on other already published sources of material. This book follows the same path. In attempting to bring an up to date overview of psychology to a readership of nurses, we have been able to draw on the knowledge and wisdom contained in many works, and if some are used often, it is a tribute to their clarity in presenting key psychological concepts. We acknowledge the value of these sources, and encourage all readers of *Psychology for Nurses* to explore the references we have cited. While the basic issues have been discussed thoroughly in this book, much of the detail, together with the empirical evidence on which these key concepts are based, may be even better understood by reference to the original material. At the end of each chapter, we have also provided references to important and informative works not specifically cited in the text. We have chosen these references because in our view they add appreciably to an understanding of the subjects covered in each chapter, and we strongly encourage the reader to explore each area further by seeking out this additional material.

Of course, we take responsibility for the way the material is put together in this book, for the opinions and interpretations we derived from that material, and for any omissions which may be found in its content. Though we have taken pains to present as contemporary as possible a collection of material, using current and widely respected source books and original research papers, the integration of that material and the examples used to enhance its relevance to the practice of nursing is largely our doing. We took on this task with enthusiasm, and

with a belief, still held, that a knowledge of psychology is central to the theory and practice of nursing, and that without this, the nurse may be constrained from achieving her full potential as a practising professional. We hope this book is able to contribute to this process in some real and material way, and in doing so, is able to enhance the development of what our society holds to be an invaluable profession.

Author's Note

We have used the female gender for all personal pronouns used to refer to nurses throughout this book. We have done this for consistency, and bearing in mind that nursing is still a profession occupied largely by women. We recognize, however, that this situation is changing, and in the past few years, more and more men have sought to enter the profession. This is an occurrence we applaud, and hope that our use of 'she' and 'her' in the text will be taken neither as sexist nor prescriptive of professional expectations in nursing.