Nurses Matter

Also by Verena Tschudin:

Counselling Skills for Nurses, 4th edition (Baillière Tindall, London)

Ethics in Nursing, 2nd edition (Butterworth Heinemann, Oxford)

Ethics (a series of eight edited books) (Scutari Press, London)

Deciding Ethically (Baillière Tindall, London)

Counselling for Loss and Bereavement (Baillière Tindall, London)

Managing Yourself (Macmillan Press, Basingstoke)

Nursing the Patient with Cancer (ed.) (Prentice Hall, Hemel Hempstead)

Nurses Matter

**Reclaiming our
professional identity**

by

Verena Tschudin

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*To Michael Wilson,
in gratitude*

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	x
1 Nurses Matter	1
Nurses matter	1
The politician, the patient and the nurse	2
Confidence in the self	11
The ethic of care	13
Making a difference	16
2 People Matter	18
People matter	19
‘Curved cucumbers’	22
Assumptions	25
Metamorphosis	27
Respect for persons	29
Individuals and society	31
Holistic relationships	34
Story telling	36
Receptivity	39
Relatedness	41
Responsiveness	43
3 Mattering Matters	46
Mattering matters	46
Mattering as the bridge between fact and value	47
Our thoughts matter	48
Our feelings matter	51
Our commitment matters	53
Our knowledge matters	56
Our professionalism matters	60

4	Mattering is More Given than Chosen	65
	More given than chosen	66
	Truth	68
	Goodness and beauty	71
	Attending	73
	Shadow and archetypes	76
5	Saying Yes and Saying No	81
	Saying no	81
	Saying yes	88
	Sharing	90
	Sharing in nursing	96
	Saying 'no' in nursing	99
	Saying 'yes' in nursing	103
6	The Ethical is the Visionary	106
	Vision and visions	107
	Spiritual components	110
	Imagination	114
	Leadership	119
	Visionary action	124
7	The Ethical is the Political	126
	Justice	127
	Political awareness	131
	Professional development	134
	Professional regulation	138
	Partnerships	141
	Making concerns known	142
	'Proper selfishness'	145
	Political action	152
8	The Ethical is the Supportive	154
	Nurses' supportive work	155
	The supportive role of management	158
	Clinical supervision	163
	Supportive action	167

9 Nurses as Moral Artists	178
Prophets	179
Leaders	182
Sharing	185
Inclusiveness	189
Bibliography	196
<i>Index</i>	208

Preface

There are any number of reasons why nurses matter, make all the difference and are indispensable. There are just as many reasons why nurses can be dispensed with and are replaceable, and why lots of people would be quite pleased not to have them around. It is not a question of persuading these people that nurses matter but of making it so obvious and natural that they cannot do anything else but believe and acknowledge that nurses are not only indispensable in today's society, but also have a vital vision, message and role. Not only does the world need to hear that message, but also nurses have to believe that they indeed have that vision, message and role, that they can make them known and that they count.

The ideas explored in this book reach both backwards and forwards. They reach backwards in that the basis of the message and vision are considered, and forwards in that possibilities of what could be achieved are envisaged. The premise that 'people matter' is more inclusive and enhancing than other ideas that have hitherto been used to give nursing an identity. 'People matter' includes everyone: those who give and those who receive. Nurses are not seen simply as professionals giving a service but as human beings relating to other human beings in personal and professional ways. This in itself is nothing new in nursing. What is new is that nursing needs a voice and an identity more urgently than ever before. People matter, what matters to them matters, and because this matters, people are enabled to be visionary, act politically and support each other and each other's visions and actions. Much of this can only happen because people – nurses and clients and patients – can see to find within themselves the creativity to say 'yes' when needed and to say 'no' when it matters.

These ideas are not in any way ground breaking. Many people before me have tried similar things; what I am doing differently is considering the subject from a basis of ethics. Bringing ethics into a subject where it had not been applied before can often make the subject look different; it is this which I will attempt here.

I believe that ethics is essentially about power and how power is used, and that also means the power to believe in oneself and one's own worth. Nursing needs to empower itself if it is to have an identity, and using ethics as a basis may be one way forward; it is not the only way, but it is a part of the way at this moment. I hope that, by sharing a little of my vision, this book will contribute to the wider identity of nursing's future.

I am writing in the style of 'we' and 'us' even though I have not been a practising nurse for many years now. As a teacher, editor and writer, I am, however, still in the field of nursing, and here I am concerned as much with the world-wide concept of nursing as a profession as with individual practitioners. It is in this sense that I still consider myself a nurse and write as one of them.

As this is a book of ideas, it is not specific to any grade or category of nurses nor indeed only to nurses. Students on Project 2000 courses might find it helpful in their studies of professional identity, and nurses who are qualified might get some ideas for expanding their horizons. Students of ethics might find it useful in looking at ethics from a different angle. I hope too that other health professionals might be stimulated in thinking further in their own areas so that barriers can be broken down and partnerships created.

This book is the result of several years' thinking and talking with many people. New ideas have constantly presented themselves, changing and shaping this book. I am particularly indebted to friends, colleagues and students in many different settings. They are too numerous to mention by name, but I hope that any who read this book will know themselves to be acknowledged and thanked. As editor of the journal *Nursing Ethics*, I am in the privileged position of reading all the articles, often several times over, which makes me familiar with much material on ethics. The contact with authors, and especially with my editorial board and consultant colleagues, pushes me also into wider visions of the possible and the practical. I am grateful to them for their insights and support.

A special thank you goes to the person who gave me permission to use the psychiatrist's story in Chapter 1.

My particular gratitude, however, goes to Lady Helen Oppenheimer, whose ideas I have used as a basis for this book and

whose comments on an early draft were not only helpful and insightful, but also humorous and highly pertinent.

The conversations (and delicious meals) with the Reverend Dr Michael and Mrs Jean Wilson in their home in Birmingham have been highlights whenever they were possible. The Wilsons have given of their generosity of spirit and their time more than they could possibly imagine, and my deepest thanks go to them. Michael's ideas in particular have been influential in the last chapter.

Last but not least, a sincere thank you is also extended to the two reviewers of the manuscript and to Richenda Milton-Thompson, publisher at Macmillan, for her unfailing support in seeing this project through the many changes and developments.

VERENA TSCHUDIN