RESEARCH FOR PRACTISING NURSES

Themes in Nursing

Can nurses care more? It is increasingly clear that there are several essential elements of nursing which are quite distinct from the specific clinical aspects of each specialty. These central elements are required throughout nursing and demand additional skills and understanding, and are of vital importance in the successful delivery of effective patient care. Among the topics to be covered in this series are: care and management; research for practising nurses; care of the patient in pain; health education; and care of people from different ethnic backgrounds.

As nursing develops it becomes more important that collaboration between the various caring professions is reinforced. Each topic in this series will be dealt with in a practical way by authors with understanding and experience of the clinical environment. To achieve this, authors have been chosen to represent a wide range of the relevant caring professions.

This series is designed to provide nurses and their colleagues with the resource of knowledge and the stimulus for discussion required by effective professionals. The books in the series can be used quite independently, but together will give an overall coverage of the key issues in clinical nursing.

These are important topics throughout nursing, both in hospital and in the community, and all practising nurses need a full understanding of them.

Series Editors

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Research for Practising Nurses

Vera H. Darling
and
Jill Rogers

with illustrations by
Audrey Pratt

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Foreword

Tradition was the basis of authority in nursing until relatively recently. Effective traditional practices and static, unchanging conditions are in mutual association. Changes in demography, health service organisations, public expectations and the practices of other professions have created circumstances in the twentieth century, in which resort to tradition as a guide to action has become increasingly outmoded and ineffective. To search again—or to re-search—in such circumstances becomes not an interesting option, but a central necessity, a *sine qua non*, for professional survival.

The Briggs Report on Nursing 1972 turned its attention to the largest and most expensive workforce in the Health Service. Opinion that had been developing for some time was crystallised in that report, namely, that nursing must research the basis for its practice.

Nurses who are responsible for those members of the public who require their services bring skill and concern to the job. In addition they have in theory, and always to themselves, in practice and sometimes also to the public as well, to give an account of the way they have performed that service and the reasons for doing it that way. The corollary of accountability is a questioning approach—could patient care have been provided more efficiently, effectively, economically, with greater patient comfort and with more satisfaction for the relatives? ‘Why does anyone decide to start on a research study or investigation?’ Essentially, because someone asks questions about accepted ways of caring for patients—this is the opening of chapter 2 of this book. Such questions will undoubtedly persist. Nurses must be able to maintain an objective, disinterested and scientifically informed dialogue on such questions both between themselves and the scientific community generally; only thus can public confidence in their practice be maintained and enhanced.

This book has been written for practising nurses who are faced with a variety of day-to-day nursing problems in all kinds of settings. It is not so much a book on the details of research methodology—more a series of signposts along the pathways that lead from the initial question, through the data, to objective and valid conclusions. Dead ends, decoys, pitfalls and quicksands are marked; so too are the routes to appropriate forms of enquiry, further reading and sources of available help. There are numerous practical tips for organising information, time and other resources.

Vera Darling and Jill Rogers have brought together their different experiences and insights—the one in nursing and nurse education, and the other in education and health services research—to the making of this book. It should help to cultivate and sustain the enquiring practical mind, and to foster a disciplined approach to modes of enquiry. The light-hearted note introduced by Audrey Pratt's illustrations and the authors' plea that 'a sense of humour is essential for sanity and success' serve to emphasise the essential seriousness of purpose of *Research for Practising Nurses*.

April 1985

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V.H.D.
J.R.