



## EDITORIAL

How is the nursing profession perceived from outside the profession itself, and how does and should the profession deal with these perceptions?

At the International Centre for Nursing Ethics (ICNE) at the University of Surrey, the academic 'home' of *Nursing Ethics*, the Value of Nursing study has been in progress for some years to elicit the value *of* nursing and values *in* nursing. This is a 10-country research project, and as such brings together west and east, though not yet north and south. The raw data from that study are now to hand and a preliminary literature review is presented by Khim Horton and her colleagues in the opening article.

The increasing globalization of the world we live in and the many problems caused by the migration of nurses combine to make it even more important to understand the nature of nursing and how it is perceived by others. It is easy for governments to overlook nursing as a force to reckon with because nurses do not, for the most part, have the voice or influence of physicians. Yet, there are about 11 million nurses in the world, and this is certainly a significant number to consider. However, if it is still so difficult for nurses to explain what is unique about nursing, what distinguishes them from other health professions, and why they are important for receiving government money, it is perhaps not difficult to understand why governments often find ways of employing cheaper personnel and give priority to medical rather than nursing issues. Nurses are incredibly good at and resourceful in making a difference to individual people, often in areas of specialization where they can have more personal autonomy. As a profession, the global voice of nursing is, however, still rather feeble. Those involved in the Value of Nursing study at ICNE are looking forward to establishing partnerships with researchers working on other similar studies and also envisage that it will develop its own momentum. In this sense, all the articles in this issue complement each other and help us to understand and formulate what the value *of* nursing is, and what values nurses hold *in* and *by* their daily care.

Turkey has for some 25 years aspired to belong to the European Union (EU) and has adapted its nursing curriculum increasingly closely to that of the EU. This includes the teaching of ethics, which is described by Selma Görgülü and Leyla Dinç. A country that has recently entered the EU is Lithuania, and the article by Jolanta Toliušienė and Eimantas Peičius describes how the changes there have been handled and how this has impacted on the profession.

Linus Vanlaere and Chris Gastmans have long been concerned with how nurses learn to care ethically, and therefore with how ethics is taught. They argue that a virtue ethics approach should incorporate certain methods in order to cultivate a caring attitude, and that reflection is critical in this.

It is not easy to talk about 'vocation' in nursing today, and Mikael Lundmark has studied the subject from a theological point of view and considers two theories. It appears that one has to balance enhanced coherence against a confessional tone, while

the other has to balance a risk of being morally judgemental against a deeper understanding of the diversity of nursing practice.

Susan Benedict and her colleagues uncover the dark history of Nazi nurses and the practice of 'euthanasia'. It is salutary to read articles like this and ask if we are really sure that nursing has changed sufficiently that such atrocities will never happen again.

The moral integrity of nurses in primary care is questioned by Carolyn Laabs – as it is in Susan Benedict's article – and a theory of maintaining moral integrity has emerged from her findings. In this theory the moral agent will encounter conflicts, make evaluations, have to draw lines, or sometimes have to find a way without crossing the line. If this article is read straight after the one by Benedict, one cannot help but compare how the two sets of nurses go about evaluating their integrity.

The last two articles are concerned with stress in the work-place, the first detailing the efforts made by nurses themselves, and the second gauging the success of a training programme aimed at decreasing such stress.

The specific issues of work-place distress are considered by nurses in China and described by Pin Feng Tang and co-authors. The causes discussed are the well-known issues of conflicting views on optimal treatments and lack of resources. The way the nurses were 'striving for competence' makes it obvious that nursing is never an easy profession, but also one where its practitioners constantly aim to give only the best care.

Sofia Kälvemark Sporrang and her colleagues report on a controlled prospective study that evaluated a structured education and training programme in ethics to discover how effective it was for reducing moral distress.

Finally, Richard Rowson highlights some problems in the way the word 'rights' is used, misused and abused in daily usage, and urges nurses to be careful of how language can distort perceptions of the facts.

The general theme of the value of nursing, the perception of nursing and how ethics is taught in nursing are given a wide overview here. The different aspects, however, once more show that nursing is far reaching, eclectic, even idiosyncratic in its practice, but can never be dismissed as unimportant.

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