



CONTEXTS OF
NURSING

**SEVENTH
EDITION**

Debra **Jackson**
Ann **Bonner**
Jacqueline **Bloomfield**
John **Daly**



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Contexts of Nursing

AN INTRODUCTION
SEVENTH EDITION

EDITED BY

DEBRA JACKSON
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PREFACE

We are delighted to present the seventh edition of *Contexts of Nursing*. We hope this edition proves to be a valuable and insightful resource for you, the reader. As with previous versions, this book serves as an introduction to the theoretical foundations, language and scholarship of nursing and healthcare. Since the publication of the first edition, our primary goal has been to offer comprehensive coverage of key concepts that shape contemporary nursing practice.

The concept of 'contexts' remains central to this edition, reflecting our perspective that nursing knowledge is like a woven fabric, interlacing theoretical strands to form a comprehensive whole. With this in mind, we have incorporated several new threads into this latest edition, addressing contemporary challenges that impact nursing practice.

In response to extensive consultation with nursing professionals, we have included new chapters on critical issues such as family violence, patient safety, simulation learning, patient perspectives and person-centred care and nursing and the environment. These additions reflect the evolving healthcare landscape and the necessity for nurses to be equipped with knowledge and skills relevant to these contemporary challenges and concerns.

This book is a collection of diverse perspectives, and as such, the chapters vary in their approach and presentation. We believe that engaging with a range of viewpoints—including those that may challenge existing beliefs—enriches learning and supports critical thinking. As nursing continues to evolve both locally in Australia and New Zealand (Aotearoa), and on a global scale, exposure to differing perspectives prepares students for the dynamic nature of the profession.

Throughout this edition, we continue to emphasise accessibility and pedagogical strength, maintaining the use of reflective questions and exercises to foster critical thinking and deeper learning. We have also introduced new strategies to encourage personal reflection, embedding them at key points in each chapter. This approach allows readers to pause, absorb and engage more meaningfully with the material. Additionally, case studies and real-world stories further contextualise key topics, helping to bridge the gap between theoretical concepts and practical application.

We extend our sincere gratitude to Elizabeth Coady, Fariha Nadeem and the dedicated team at Elsevier for their continuing support and enthusiasm throughout the development of this edition. Above all, we thank our contributors, who have once again embraced the challenge of producing engaging, scholarly and thought-provoking content to inspire reflection, discussion and growth within the nursing community.

Debra Jackson AO
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CHAPTER 1

PRESENTING NURSING ... A CAREER FOR LIFE

Debra Jackson, Jacqueline Bloomfield, Ann Bonner and John Daly

KEY WORDS

career
critical perspectives
lifelong learning
nursing
nursing stereotypes

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, readers should be able to:

- ▶ list some of the myths, legends and stereotypes that surround nursing
- ▶ arrive at a personal beginning definition of nursing
- ▶ understand their passion for nursing
- ▶ discuss some of the choices that a nursing degree offers for graduates
- ▶ describe the meaning of the term 'professional conduct'.

Why nursing?

Nursing is a unique and wonderful career choice. It is a curious mix of technology and myth, of science and art, of reality and fiction. It blends the concrete and the abstract. It combines thinking and doing, 'being with' and 'doing for'. Nurses have privileged access to people's homes and share some of the most precious and highly intimate moments in people's lives—moments that remain hidden from most other people and professions. Nurses witness birth and death, and just about everything in between. Nurses share in people's most difficult moments of suffering and pain, and also bear witness to times of great joy and happiness. Because of the special place in society that nurses hold, nurses enjoy a high level of community trust. Indeed, in Australia and New Zealand (Aotearoa), nurses continually rank very highly in surveys of public confidence and trust.

In this opening chapter, we aim to share what captured us and created our passion and enthusiasm for the wonderful career that is nursing—the passion and enthusiasm that has sustained and carried us successfully through our nursing careers. We also introduce you to some of the ideas of interest to nurses and nursing, many of which are discussed in more detail in subsequent chapters of this book.

REFLECTION

What are the main reasons you have chosen a career in nursing?

Nursing: myths, legends and stereotypes

Philosophically, nursing has gone through a number of historical transitions. Asceticism, arising from our origins in religion and the army, then romanticism, followed by humanism. Perhaps more than any other professional group, nursing and nurses are the subject of myth and popular belief; there are also many fictionalised (or romantic) connotations. Certain of these myths and beliefs are almost folkloric, yet they strongly influence the ways in which nurses are perceived by the general public and also in the ways that nurses see themselves. Through the media, nursing is often portrayed as a dramatic, exciting, glamorous and romantic activity, with nurses frequently represented in the role of handmaiden/helper to medical doctors.

Nursing is endlessly fascinating to many people, and this is reflected in the number of documentaries and reality shows, fictional television dramas, novels and movies that feature nursing and nurses as a major component. A recent Australian study examining the representation of nurses in a reality show highlighted that while nurses were a major part of the show (with 19/54 characters being nurses), they tended to be represented as background actors, and the medical role was privileged (Hayward 2023). So, while the representation of nurses is not always accurate, or realistic, there is not the same level of entertainment interest in bank workers or bus drivers or beauty therapists, or even other health professionals such as pharmacists or dietitians, for example.

Nursing is ripe with imagery. Many of the images associated with nurses are seemingly at odds with one another, yet all may be conjured up by the word 'nurse'. Images of selflessness, kindness, compassion and dedication, hard work, long hours, submission and low pay are among the things that come to mind for some people when they think of nurses. But though nursing practice has current or historical elements of all these things, there is so much more to nurses than these portray.

The recent global COVID-19 pandemic revealed the importance and centrality of nurses and nursing to public health, and this was shown across all areas from intensive care through to primary care environments, and everything in between. Throughout the pandemic, nurses all over the world worked in conditions of incredible stress in difficult conditions and very rapidly changing environments (Anderson et al 2023, Yang et al 2022). Nurses were subject to widespread redeployment into different areas and new roles, such as medical hotel quarantine roles (Jefferies et al 2023, Veerapen & McKeown 2021). Student nurses also experienced massive and rapid disruption as a result of the pandemic (Griscti et al 2023, Usher et al 2023). Despite the unprecedented challenges presented by the pandemic, nurses made an enormous contribution across multiple areas. In addition to providing

the direct care of patients affected by COVID-19, nurses were active in the vaccination effort (Burden et al 2021), and nurses developed and implemented new ways of working (Endacott et al 2022). Nurses led the development of many life-saving initiatives such as immunisation centres and infection control procedures. Nurse researchers all over the world remained very active, publishing large amounts of literature to contribute to knowledge that could inform future pandemic responses (Jackson 2022).

The actions and service of nurses during the COVID-19 pandemic is only the latest chapter in nursing history. Throughout nursing history, there are many stories of the fortitude, bravery and courage shown by Australian, New Zealand (Aotearoa) and global nurses in wartime and other times of community hardship. Chapter 2 in this book provides a comprehensive overview of nursing history to extend the reader's understanding of the rich and varied history of nursing.

Nursing and nurses are subject to various entrenched stereotypes (Girvin 2015, Girvin et al 2016), and some of these are at least partly derived from the myth that surrounds nursing. In what has become an important and classic work, Kalisch et al (1983) identified some major ways that nursing and nurses were stereotyped, and though this work was undertaken in the United States more than two decades ago, it still remains relevant to nurses today. The media and popular literature also tend to present nurses as having stereotyped personal characteristics such as youthfulness, femaleness, purity and naivety, altruism and idealism, compliance and diminutive stature and 'good character' (Fealy et al 2015).

REFLECTION

Consider the popular stereotypes of nurses. How many can you identify? Do any describe you? Did any of these stereotypes influence your decision to become a nurse?

Co-existing with the romantic myths and stereotypes surrounding nurses is the reality of nursing. This reality is that nurses become acquainted with the visceral and raw aspects of humanity that are usually hidden from the world, because of the illness, the incapacity, the frailty, the disability or other needs of those who are the recipients of nursing care. The practice of nursing provides opportunities for human connectedness and growth that few other careers can offer. Values of humanism in nursing are enacted and embodied through the commitment to compassion and respectful relationships that are sensitive to the belief systems and cultural practices of others.

It is important to recognise that the concept of 'nurse' is socially constructed, and that nurses may want to believe in their power and control, but the broader societal context situates nurses in a much more fragile position. Nurses and nursing practice exist within a healthcare system, bound by authority and power that generally nurses do not have control over. Some of the effects of this on nursing can be found later in this book, in Chapter 10.

How to define nursing?

The urge to define nursing has attracted the attention of nurse scholars for many years. While defining a nurse is relatively simple, as you will see as you read further in this chapter, nursing itself has proved somewhat more challenging to define. There is a wide variation internationally in the definitions of

nursing roles. Though you can probably describe what you think nursing is, the nature and breadth of activities that comprise nursing have contributed to the difficulties associated with defining nursing. Some definitions centre on the functions of a nurse, rather than offering an intrinsic definition of nursing. In a now historical piece of writing which has endured, Henderson produced such a definition of nursing:

The unique function of the nurse is to assist the individual, sick or well, in the performance of those activities contributing to health or its recovery (or to a peaceful death) that he [sic] would perform unaided if he [sic] had the necessary strength, will or knowledge. And to do this in such a way as to help him [sic] gain independence as rapidly as possible.

(Henderson 1964)

Though many people may feel they have a clear view of what a nurse is and what a nurse does, nursing is complex. The complexities associated with defining nursing mean that some definitions may seem cumbersome and quite ambiguous. But remember that this is more a reflection of the complex nature of nursing than any lack of clarity on behalf of those who have proffered a definition. The International Council of Nurses (ICN), a coalition of nurses' associations that represents nurses in more than 120 countries, has captured some of the complexities in its definition:

Nursing encompasses autonomous and collaborative care of individuals of all ages, families, groups and communities, sick or well and in all settings. Nursing includes the promotion of health, prevention of illness, and the care of ill, disabled and dying people. Advocacy, promotion of a safe environment, research, participation in shaping health policy and in patient and health systems management, and education are also key nursing roles.

(International Council of Nurses [ICN] n.d.)

REFLECTION

- 1 Why do you think nursing has proved difficult to define?
- 2 How is nursing defined in your own jurisdiction? Consider this definition in relation to one from another jurisdiction, region or country and consider any differences or similarities.

Choosing nursing

We have accumulated more than 100 years of being a nurse between us, and none of us have any regrets about choosing nursing. Our careers have taken us in many exciting and rewarding directions and to work in many different contexts and regions. A degree in nursing provides a foundation for lifelong learning. It is the entry requirement to a fulfilling career, to a range of postgraduate courses in areas as diverse as paediatrics, midwifery, emergency nursing, disaster nursing, flight nursing, cancer care, community nursing, women's health, nurse education, nursing research and healthcare administration. Age and experience are valued in nursing.

Nursing has long been viewed as an appropriate career choice for females, but males also form a significant (and increasing) part of the nursing workforce. The most current figures in Australia indicate that 11.9% of the Australian nursing workforce is male (NMBA 2024). In New Zealand

(Aotearoa), the number of men in the nursing workforce is 9% (Guy et al 2022). Recent research has highlighted a lack of awareness of nursing as a career choice for men (Guy et al 2022), and men in nursing experiencing some forms of stigma and misconceptions, though there is some evidence that this is improving (Ramjan et al 2023).

A career in nursing offers continuing potential for achievement, growth and development. It has also traditionally been a profession that attracted people motivated by altruism and the desire to make a difference to people suffering because of illness, injury, disability and disadvantage. Indeed, this is still a significant motivator for people who choose nursing today. Since the 1970s the profession of nursing has made stronger claims for a focus on health promotion and primary healthcare, and this now has greater emphasis in the construction of nursing knowledge and in the conceptualisation of practice due to the ageing of the population, the increase in chronic disease, and the pressures on the healthcare system. But further to that, there was an overriding quest for understanding and caring for people.

Nursing is not just one thing and over the past couple of decades, nurses' roles and career structures have grown and developed, meaning that nursing can be (and is), a career for life. Unlike many other professions and career choices in which people experience increasing difficulty in obtaining work as they get older, nurses can remain productively employed until retirement, and even post-retirement. Career interruption because of family responsibilities (or other reasons) can be extremely disadvantageous in some professions, but many nurses have effectively blended very successful careers with raising families. Nursing opens many doors. Internationally, Australian and New Zealand (Aotearoa) registered nurses are well respected and can gain registration and practise nursing in many other countries.

Nursing: what sustains us?

One of the things that has sustained us all through our own careers is the ability to continue to effect positive change in nursing. As nurses, educators and researchers we have been able to identify areas for change, help generate the knowledge needed to inform that change and then participate in the implementation and evaluation of that change. Nurses work in climates of continual change, and over the years of our own nursing careers we have witnessed many developments—from how students are prepared for registration as nurses, through to alterations in the environment in which nurses work. Nursing curricula and nurse education have changed enormously over the years, and today's nursing students have a comprehensive and well-rounded education with an awareness of social determinants of health and the need to recognise culture as central to human experience (Jackson 2023). Another major difference is the increased realisation of the importance of research; the importance of both generating and drawing on robust evidence to underpin our practice as professional nurses. As students of nursing, you will hear and learn a lot about evidence and its role in shaping practice. In Chapter 21 you will be able to learn more about research evidence and its relevance to, and use for, nursing.

Nursing is an incredibly rewarding and gratifying career. However, as with all professions that work closely with people experiencing crises and challenges, there is increasing awareness of the need for support and deliberate self-care. This is essential as people working in professions with high emotional involvement, who work long hours and work in situations of pressure are at risk of experiencing negative sequelae, such as burnout. Over the past couple of decades, healthcare organisations have developed an increased awareness of the need to adequately support staff, and so most now have a

range of services for staff, including counselling and other services. Nurse wellbeing has become an active area for nurse researchers, who provide evidence that can help healthcare organisations to enhance retention by providing more positive work environments for nurses (see, e.g., Poghosyan et al 2022, Teoh et al 2022). An increased awareness of the links between nurse wellbeing and staff retention means that more and more organisations are paying more attention to quality leadership, and strategies such as self-rostering to assist nurses to better manage work as well as their other (personal) responsibilities.

REFLECTION

- 1 What has been your experience, so far, of nursing?
- 2 What motivated you to become a nurse?
- 3 What now sustains you?

Professional regulation and conduct

Nurses are expected to be people of integrity who conduct themselves with a high level of personal honour, accountability and veracity. It is important that members of the public feel safe in hospitals and believe themselves to be in trustworthy and competent hands. If people do not feel safe, they would not be able to feel secure in leaving their loved ones in the care of nurses and healthcare facilities. Nursing authorities in Australia, New Zealand (Aotearoa) and many other countries act to ensure the safety of the public by holding nurses accountable for their actions and making nurses answerable for their behaviour and any complaints that are made against them. To gain initial registration as a nurse, nursing applicants need to demonstrate they are competent and of good character, and this must be maintained throughout professional life.

REFLECTION

What do you see as essential personal qualities for nurses?

Nurses are answerable to registering authorities that have the power to question nurses and suspend or remove them from the register. These same authorities can also place conditions on registration, restricting practice or, in certain circumstances, requiring a nurse to participate in educational programs. The conduct of nurses is also guided by various codes that inform professional conduct. Though these vary depending on country, they are remarkably similar in substance. This is because the values of nursing cross national and international boundaries. It is an interesting exercise to use the internet and search for the Code of Conduct that governs nurses in your location.

REFLECTION

What are some examples of good and poor professional conduct? If you have worked in a clinical setting, or been on a clinical placement, can you think of some from your own practice experience?

CONCLUSION

Nursing attracts people from all walks of life. Many readers of this text will be entering nursing as school leavers, but others will be mature-age students who come to nursing with a variety of life experiences. Welcome to the profession of nursing, and congratulations on making a choice that will open many doors for you and provide you with a career for life. You may find it challenging and, possibly, not quite what you expected. But go with your passion and believe in yourself—because you can create your life. The road you have chosen is not an easy one, but you need to believe in yourself, as we do, to succeed. We take this opportunity to wish you as satisfying a career in nursing as we have had.

Recommended readings

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