



Nursing's essence and the health care needs of humanity

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Nursing, like life itself, should be positioned within an underlying philosophy, which for me, has always commenced with the 'spirit' or 'essence' that motivates all nursing actions. This 'essence' is first and foremost a moral one where nurses everywhere are charged with the task of meeting the care-based health needs of humankind in an ethically mindful fashion.

This phenomenon is to be found in various guises in all four articles nominated for this special retrospective review of *Nursing Praxis* articles over the last thirty-five years. In Jocelyn Keith's (1987) case, this essential meaning is founded in the power of the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** (United Nations, 1948) and developed in the socially mindful responses of nurses. However, being 'socially aware' has several possible meanings, and over the years, nurses have often found it difficult to turn this awareness into entirely satisfactory responses. For instance, in Irihapeti Ramsden's (1990) eyes, this awareness within the 'spirit' of nursing is reflected not just by reference to Nightingale's morality and role modelling, but to human decency which is accurately focussed on offering true cultural respect towards others in our care. At times, this task remains a difficult one for nurses within a healthcare system that still struggles to recognise that nurses sometimes practice within an ethical climate that does not always fully support such necessary vigilance. Jill Wilkinson's (2008a, 2008b) articles extend both of these major concepts by strongly suggesting that nurses must continue to strive for social justice, a major moral imperative, through individual and collective actions. Such actions, be they supported by either the professional or the 'unionised' wings of the profession, should therefore remain a necessary focus of any nursing organisation in Aotearoa New Zealand.



Hence, if we are ever going to be able to claim that nurses fully contribute to the healthcare needs of humanity in truly meaningful ways, we should therefore begin with a re-examination of our philosophical roots, and especially the ongoing necessity for the use of our own pragmatic but heavily socially aware care-focussed ethics, before acting accordingly. Curiously enough, Nightingale's emphasis on united and unified moral and practical responses within a strong public health agenda, and her advocacy for evidence-informed public policy, is as relevant now (and especially now in this time of the next great pandemic) as it was in her time.

References

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