

EDITORIAL

Reflections on Nursing Discipline, Profession, and Education

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The discipline of nursing can be practiced thru knowledge creation and dissemination in the academe and knowledge expression in the service sector. Nurses working in the academe must create or transmit the unique nursing knowledge to practice nursing fully. Nurses in the academe are the custodian of the nursing discipline.

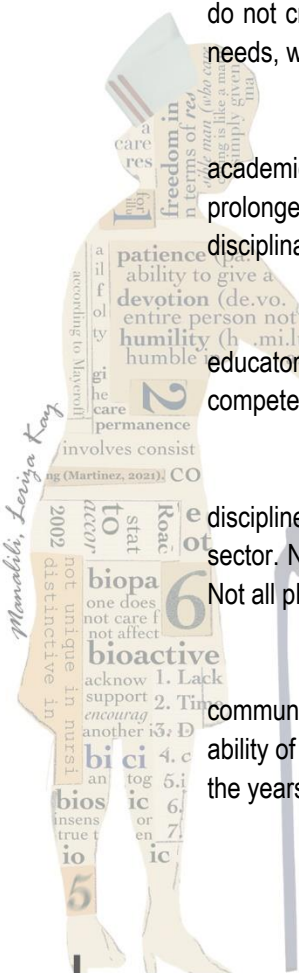
On the other hand, nurses working in the service sector (hospital, clinic, community) are the face of the profession. They represent and project the image of nurses to society at large. Their actions are deliberate expressions of their nursing knowledge. They do not create nor transmit nursing knowledge but transform them to respond to society's needs, with a specific focus on the betterment of human life.

The dilemma lies in the assumption that those more inclined to study nursing as an academic discipline and basic science, must be exposed to the service sector for a prolonged period. What they will learn from this exposure are technical proficiencies and not disciplinary insights.

Some assume that extensive exposure to the service sector will make future educators more proficient in knowledge creation and transfer. They correlate technical competencies with expertise in nursing knowledge when these two are not the same at all.

What is needed is to start treating nursing as basic science and an academic discipline expressed in practice and not an applied science practiced only thru the service sector. Not all sociologists are social workers, nor all psychologists practicing in the clinic. Not all pharmacists work in the drug store, nor do all chemists practice in the laboratory.

The assumption that nurses should be bounded within the hospitals, clinics, or community needs to be drastically altered. Nurses can be scientists in their own right. The ability of a nurse scientist to create and disseminate nursing knowledge is not measured by the years they have worked in the hospital carrying out physician's orders.



Although it is the clinical practice that is assumed to be the essence of nursing discipline, the service sector does not substantiate the identity of a nurse nor expound the unique nursing knowledge. There is a seeming confusion between nursing as a discipline and nursing as a profession. As a discipline, the central essence of nursing lies within its unique nursing knowledge, societal relevance, and shared values orientation (Donaldson & Crowley, 1978). As a profession, nursing applies this nursing knowledge for the betterment of society, more specifically to elevate the lives of its members thru clinical practice. The unique knowledge and perspective of the discipline are expressed thru its profession. This distinct knowledge makes nursing a discipline and its practitioners, professionals.

And so, graduate programs in nursing must be explicit in their mandate as to what outcomes they want to produce in their graduates. Are they training practitioners of the profession or educating scientists of the discipline?

When educating nurses, there needs to have a deliberate emphasis that ancillary knowledge, the knowledge that is either borrowed or shared from other disciplines, is not nursing knowledge. Although this ancillary knowledge is essential in the expression of the profession, what is being expressed and why it is being actualized must take center stage.

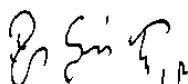
Take therapeutic communication as an example. It is often falsely assumed that therapeutic communication techniques are exclusively or uniquely nursing when they are skills emanating from a borrowed knowledge that is not nursing. Even if borrowed knowledge forms part of the common knowledge or becomes part of ancillary knowledge shared with other professional disciplines, it is still not part of nursing knowledge.

On the other hand, when therapeutic communication is emphasized as one of the varied ways by which the process of knowing persons as caring persons can be achieved, what we are doing is transmitting nursing knowledge. The perspective that a person is a caring person (Boykin & Schoenhofer, 1993), a sentient, unitary, and unpredictable being is uniquely nursing. If nurse educators' prime focus is developing competence on a skill without emphasizing what nursing knowledge is being expressed, they are merely teaching a skill set, not transmitting nursing knowledge.

The relationship between nursing knowledge and ancillary knowledge within the discipline and profession of nursing is complicated and complex. The continued call for research that is disciplinary rather than ancillary to entangle these intricacies becomes more necessary and crucial in our contemporary times.

References

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