Honoring the Past, Pursuing the Future

Rita H. Pickler

Nursing Research has led the way in scholarship for nursing practice and policy for 65 years. As the new Editor of Nursing Research, I know that now, more than ever, it is important to continue the tradition of publishing high-quality research reports, thoughtful commentaries, and insightful discussions of research methods and strategies. In preparing this editorial, I read a number of past editorials (I think all new editors must do this), including the first editorial written by Helen Bunge—the first chair of the Editorial Board—who laid forth the Nursing Research mission to improve nursing care, alleviate human suffering, and promote well-being (Bunge, 1952). This lofty mission has guided the journal well over the years and continues to provide direction for the range and scope of journal papers.

I also read the last editorial of Lucille Notter—who was second of the Nursing Research six editors—in which she raised the need for clinical studies and greater “communication” between researchers and practitioners (Notter, 1973). Some things, it seems, do not really change; we continue to need high-quality clinical research with results communicated in a clear and timely manner in order to provide evidence for practice. We also need to continuously appraise changes in clinical practice and our understanding of human health and healthcare delivery in order to be sure we are addressing issues that are most critical to disciplinary knowledge and professional practice. Notter also noted that nursing research needed supportive and well-resourced research environments to develop nurse researchers for the future. Again, as in the past, nursing research continues to need financing supportive of its clinical focus and concerted professional and disciplinary sponsorship if nurse researchers are to continue making scientific advancements that improve health and human well-being.

I also read with interest the editorials of Elizabeth Carnegie, who I was privileged to know and whom I admired greatly, and those of Florence Downs, who was editor when I first published in Nursing Research and whose intellect and commitment to nursing were amazing. The editorials of Mickey Dougherty and Sue Henly were particularly meaningful to read, given their contemporary aspects. In fact, our most recent editors have done much to ensure that Nursing Research continues as one of the most respected journals in nursing.

I have read as well the many guest editorials written over the years. These editorial writers included many of nursing’s past and current leaders. The editorials addressed contemporary issues affecting the conduct and focus of nursing research as well as the scientific and disciplinary trends that emerged over the years. These guest editorials provide further evidence of the splendid past of Nursing Research and set the standard for our desired future.

As a human caring profession and a scientific discipline, nursing must engage in, report, and apply research. I do not think it is possible to separate the practice of nursing from its science. Thus, journals like Nursing Research are critically needed to provide researchers an avenue for dissemination of research findings to enhance the practice of nursing and stimulate further scientific work in nursing and related fields. This means our science needs to encompass all manner of research, from discovery to translation, from bench to bedside, from mechanistic to holistic. We have so much to know and understand if we are to achieve our goals; limiting our research to certain methods, phenomena, or level of discovery would only constrain our future.

The world in which the science of nursing is conducted has greatly changed over the decades. It is a much more connected world today than it was 65 years ago. We now have increased understanding that what happens in the most remote areas of the world can affect those who live many miles and countries away. This is so even though the practice of nursing and the focus and methods of its research may be vastly different in approach and scope across countries. Over the next few years, we need to find ways through research to identify the commonalities in our health and healthcare experiences and to bring what is learned from that research to the practitioners who need that knowledge to provide the best possible care around the world.

I enjoyed my reading through time, and I have made a commitment to myself to spend more time reading early research papers published in the journal; I believe that doing so will enhance my understanding of the past in order to meet the challenges of the future. As the new editor of Nursing Research, I will work closely with the editorial board, publisher, affiliated research societies, and disciplinary leaders to continue the journal’s tradition of excellence. However, ultimately, the quality of Nursing Research is in its content. For this, we will depend on you, our readers and authors, to provide us with the papers, protocols, abstracts, and commentaries that will ensure we continue to meet the journal’s mission.
I believe it is important to remember our past and to celebrate it; it is a fine history that has been established at *Nursing Research*. At the same time, we must move toward our future. I look forward to this future and to your active participation in its creation.

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