

## FROM THE EDITORS - Margaret McMillan and Jane Conway

### ADVANCING NURSING PRACTICE

The papers in this *AJAN* exemplify how nurses participate in, lead, and respond to situations of uncertainty. Recurring themes in the literature related to advancing nursing practice are the need to demonstrate commitment, confidence, resourcefulness and resilience in order to influence and react positively to change. Each of the papers highlights one or other of these attributes.

It is often argued that as professionals, nurses need to continue to be able to examine practice in order to develop strategies to address the gap between 'knowing about' and 'doing'. Education is frequently proffered as the solution to deficits in practice. However, the paper by Jastrzab, Fairbrother, Kerr and McInerney, in which they explore nurses' knowledge, attitudes and beliefs about pain, suggests that despite considerable effort to promote change in practice through education, transfer of knowledge into practice is influenced by a range of factors including a sense of confidence in one's practice and a willingness to change. Greater levels of confidence result from addressing challenges and achieving success when implementing options in approaches to care. In addition to this, confidence is enhanced when systems and processes are supportive of development of practice and practitioners. Sinclair, Boyd and Sinnott describe an alternative approach to assessment and discharge planning through enhancing the nurse's roles and functions and embedding this in a supportive organisational structure. This, they argue, leads to streamlining care and efficient and effective use of resources.

In a similar vein, O'Keefe and Gardner's discussion of the development of the sexual health nurse practitioner role indicates the extent to which nurses can enhance service delivery, engage with diverse clientele, promote client knowledge of and compliance with preventative strategies, and contribute to the development and implementation of standardised protocols.

Further evidence of the nurses' ability to manage resources effectively, both fiscal and human, is presented in the paper by Barrett, Stevens and Taranter whose research provides useful insight into how nurses' questioning of procedures and existing protocols can result in significant cost savings. In principle, it would be reassuring if the cost savings achieved were realigned to other core nursing activities - as nurses often achieve

cost savings but do not reap the benefits. It would seem that while nurses may have knowledge of strategies that would enhance practice they often struggle to remain resilient in the face of resistance.

Davis, Edwards, Mohay and Wollin's paper, which explores the course of depression in mothers of premature infants, suggests that nurses have an important role to play in facilitating the development of courage and resilience among woman who experience increased stress and depression.

Nurses themselves need to develop the capacity to enhance their own resilience. In the paper titled 'The Deakin Coping Scale', Moore provides insight into how nurses cope effectively with stressful situations and identifies strategies that enhance or inhibit coping. Resilience is reflected in the efforts of nurses to enhance the quality of care they deliver. A particular level of commitment is needed to manage symptoms and situations, because the dynamic nature of contexts of practice often results in fragmentation of patient experiences.

At another level, the dynamic nature of the political and social contexts of nursing has the potential to result in fragmentation of the profession. Ella Lowe's guest editorial provides an overview of the conduct of the Australian National Review of Nursing Education (Commonwealth of Australia 2002). Lowe focuses on nurse education and emphasises the incongruence between funding models and the cost of supervision of undergraduate students. In addition, her editorial alludes to the reform agenda and the frustrations and challenges of awaiting outcomes of decision making external to nursing.

It seems tenacity, patience and commitment will be required of the profession as we await the generation of policy that will make a meaningful contribution to advancing nursing practice.

### REFERENCE

Commonwealth of Australia. 2002. *National review of nursing education 2002*. Canberra: AusInfo.