

## FROM THE EDITORS - Margaret McMillan and Jane Conway

### DESCRIBING NEED AND SHAPING PRACTICE: AN OVERVIEW OF SUBMISSIONS TO AJAN

The guest editorial in this *AJAN* reflects the extent to which we believe in the value of practice as a scholarly endeavour. In this editorial we have chosen to reflect on how submission to a journal such as *AJAN* both describes and shapes advanced practice. In order to determine this, we have conducted a trend analysis of the work submitted for consideration for publication. The trend analysis revealed a number of recurring themes that are reflective of elements of advanced nursing practice which are universally applicable rather than specialty or context specific.

Close analysis of the contributions to *AJAN* in recent times provides the editors with some insight into what nurse clinicians, scholars and educators are thinking and reading about and the foci of their research efforts. An overview of the topics submitted for consideration provides a snapshot of contemporary issues pertinent to nursing practice, scholarship and education. These include:

- the diversity of contexts of practice;
- strategies for symptom management, approaches to care and decision making for quality patient outcomes;
- issues specific to life transitions from birth to death and gender;
- expressions of culture and its impact on practice and education;
- ethical, moral and philosophical dilemmas;
- nurses' responses to the ageing demographic;
- strategies for managing service processes and symptoms; and,
- preferences for research methodologies that address particular types of research questions.

Implicit in the research and scholarly papers submitted to *AJAN* is a clear demonstration of the capabilities of nurses with respect to planning and strategising in order to provide high levels of care and support for clientele whether they are patients or peers. Researchers are telling us about the problems that drove the development of their study questions, their research journey and the implications for patients and colleagues. There is generally evidence of critical reflection on practice and the application of solution oriented approaches to engaging in and responding to change in contexts, systems and processes.

There is also evidence of the complexity of the range of agenda confronting nurses in the workplace. In particular, writers are demonstrating proactive case

management and a capacity to find answers to challenging patient and personnel problems.

It would seem that the primary roles and functions of nursing work described by those who contribute to *AJAN* centre on a generic range of issues demonstrating:

- therapeutic relationships;
- care relationships;
- ethically justifiable practices;
- the effective utilisation of staff and other resources;
- the use of multiple approaches to decision making; and,
- the successes and challenges inherent in managing care for individuals and groups.

As the *AJAN* editors we are part of a process of peer review of articles submitted for publication. We look for consistency with *AJAN* guidelines, but above all we are looking for good ideas that will inform future directions in the care of people for whom nurses are responsible for and to.

In order to maintain objectivity and rigour, we use a cadre of peers with specialist insight into the range of nursing practices reflective of the needs within contemporary society and health services. Every article is reviewed by two reviewers who are able to detect what is different about the article, evaluate how well the messages are conveyed, determine how practical the ideas are when tested against the needs of consumers, and comment upon the extent to which alternative strategies are novel, feasible and sustainable. Both the writer and the reviewers retain their anonymity and thus the reviewers can provide objective and constructive feedback.

As editors we have to make the final judgment about the value of proceeding to publication. Sometimes we are faced with divergent sets of feedback and therefore have to act as mediators or seek an additional reviewer's insights. Whilst the process is lengthy, it needs to be thorough as we showcase nurses and nursing practice. We often have to temper our belief in the ideas with an appreciation of the extent to which the contribution to the literature is useful, interesting and generalisable.

While we value the contributions of nurses irrespective of their context of practice, their models of care and their views on the discipline of nursing, we are looking for articles that will capture the imagination of readers. We may be struck by the passion of the writer but can be challenged by the apparent lack of objectivity or structure to the arguments and the solutions posed by author/s. Indeed sometimes there might not be a high enough level of critique in the original submission. Authors frequently

celebrate their personal knowledge development and recently acquired awareness of the problems in contemporary practice through submitting work for publication. Sometimes, this leads to a limited awareness of the degree to which the solutions posed, while novel in a specific context, may be part of well established practice and patterns of delivery elsewhere. Sometimes submissions are redirected by the reviewers and/or editors to a different publication forum, often special interest group journals.

It is vital that more researchers and writers become reviewers as this process provides great insight into the inherent responsibility that role entails. It is a process that

requires collegial generosity but also considerable skill in the manner in which feedback is provided to authors. There is a need to be constructive in encouraging peers to write in a way that is meaningful to readers, yet maintains and develops the direction of the profession. Authors may be passionate about their research or practice journey but need to be able to engage others if lessons about practice are to be taken up.

This ability to share the professional development of self and seek and respond constructively to feedback provided by peers on submitted work should be highly valued as it is itself evidence of an element of advanced practice.

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