

Chapter 1: Social, Philosophical, and Other Historical Forces Influencing the Development of Nursing

Overview

The intent of this chapter is to set the tone of the book relative to nurses' role in ethical and moral decision making. The very existence of the profession is examined in light of moral thinking and response to human need. Nursing is viewed as an explicit expression of moral belief, finding its origin within the context of moral norms, individual values, and social need. Recognizing that a narrow perspective hinders thoughtful, open-minded consideration of sensitive issues, we attempt to identify the context of nursing in Western cultures as it corresponds to various cultural and historic influences. This chapter gives nurses insight into the profession as a part of an overall social system—focusing specifically on the historical influences of the practice of religion and the status of women in society as well as examining the effect of philosophy on beliefs and practices within society. Students will learn that throughout history, spiritual beliefs, religious practice, cultural norms, philosophy, and political factors have influenced evolutionary changes in the profession and continue to have an impact on nursing today. Moreover, inasmuch as nursing is primarily a profession of women, the social status of women affects the status of the profession. As a result, the status of the nursing profession within the broader society determines members' ability to practice with freedom and responsibility. Strengthened by these insights, nurses are empowered to examine issues thoughtfully and participate as legitimate members in the decision-making process.

Instructional Strategies

- Ask students to write an answer to the question, “Why do people choose to help others who are in need?” Use Ask Yourself: What Is the Motivation for Helping? to prompt thinking on the topic.
- In class, discuss Think About It: Who Has the Right to Make Ethical Decisions? To stimulate class participation, ask additional questions, such as the following: Who is the leader of the health care team? Is expertise in ethical decision making the sole domain of the physician? What is the role of the nurse in the decision-making process? (Anticipate that students will answer this question differently nearer the end of the course.)
- Invite two or three retired nurses to participate in a panel discussion. Ask them to describe the profession of nursing as they experienced it in their early years of practice. Ask them particular questions about the strict regulations in nursing programs and hospitals, including rules about personal behavior, uniforms, independent functions of nurses, and the implicit or explicit requirement that nurses show deference to physicians.
- Ask students to write a three- to five-page paper entitled “How Historical Influences of the Reformation and Renaissance Shape Contemporary Nursing.”
- Assign students to search the library for old ethics texts and nursing history books published in the early twentieth century. Ask students to contrast the manner in which nursing is portrayed in these older texts with the reality of nursing today.

Teaching Aids and Resources

- Students respond with interest to a visual representation of the time line of history such as: Edward Hill's *The Wall Chart of World History: From Earliest Times to the Present*. (Updated periodically). Dorset Press. ISBN: 0-88029-239-3. This resource provides a visual overview of

the history of major cultures throughout recorded time, and allows students to see the temporal relationship of the various phases of nursing to world history. It also gives them an appreciation for the short period of time that contemporary nursing has existed.

- The film *Sentimental Women Need Not Apply: A History of the American Nurse* reinforces information offered in Chapter 1 and visually portrays historical periods and personalities through the use of artwork, photographs, and historical film.
- The following books provide examples and discussions of the historical issues discussed in Chapter 1:

Achterberg, J. (1991). *Woman as healer*. Shambala.

American Nurses Association. (2010). *Nursing's social policy statement*. Washington, DC: Author.

Donahue, M. P. (1996). *Nursing: The finest art*. St. Louis, MO: Mosby.

Dossey, B. M. (2000). *Florence Nightingale: Mystic, visionary, healer*. Springhouse, PA: Springhouse.

Ehrenreigh, B., & English, D. (1973). *Witches, midwives, and nurses: A history of women healers*. New York: The Feminist Press.

Nightingale, F. (1859). *Notes on nursing: What it is and what it is not*. London: Harrison & Sons.

- The following websites for pictures and history of Florence Nightingale:
<http://www.clendenning.kumc.edu/dc/fn>
<http://www.agnesscott.edu/Lriddle/WOMEN/nitegale.htm>
<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/REnightingale.htm>
<http://www.biography.com/people/florence-nightingale-9423539?page=1>

Critical Reflection Exercise

Compare and contrast the role of the nurse in the decision-making process today versus a specific point in past nursing history. Discuss historical influences on the role of the nurse in decision making in the health care setting.

Evaluative Hints

Look for evidence that the student:

1. Appreciates the power of history and tradition.
2. Considers the effect of philosophy on beliefs and practices within society.
3. Recognizes constraints on today's nursing profession related to historical influences.
4. Begins to understand that change relies upon recognizing current and past conditions.