
From the editor

It seems particularly appropriate to begin the fourth volume of *ANS* with an issue focusing on the topic of accountability in scholarship. As a discipline, nursing has made significant strides in scholarship over the past decade. We sometimes view our discipline through a comparative lens, more clearly focused on the state of development of other related disciplines, thus our view of our own development is out of focus and distorted. If we bring our view of our own discipline into sharp focus, we can begin to appreciate the state of our own development while remaining sensitive to needs for further development.

Nursing, as a component of culture and society, reflects ongoing societal changes and unrest. We are in a unique position in relation to the changing constellation of the health care system and society. Nursing has long stood for the values that the public now demands of the health care system, and yet we feel not quite ready to respond in the most effective way.

There is a healthy controversy among members of the discipline as to how we might best develop our practice and science to meet the changing demands of society. One view is to develop the practice of nursing within a political and social network in ways that make it possible for nursing to be increasingly available to consumers of health care. Another view is to develop the science of nursing in order to provide a sound foundation for practice, to develop alternative and effective approaches in nursing, and to demonstrate the effectiveness of nursing practice.

Underlying both of these necessary approaches is the basic problem of accountability. The concept of accountability encompasses value, theoretical, and practical dimensions. The philosophic or value questions that must be addressed in relation to accountability center on the question of "to whom is one

accountable, and for what?" While accountability is primarily centered on the health care consumer when we examine the literature dealing with accountability, we also recognize that we do have a degree of accountability to ourselves as a discipline and to other disciplines within the health care system. A well-articulated philosophy of accountability will provide direction for fulfilling all dimensions of accountability while remaining primarily focused on the health care consumer.

The theoretical dimension of the concept of accountability involves defining and refining the key concepts of the discipline, how we predict interactions occurring in the real world, and the theoretical purposes or goals we seek to obtain through nursing. To the extent that we can accomplish these theoretical functions and demonstrate their empirical validity, we fulfill the theoretical demands of accountability.

The practical dimension of accountability involves a wide range of considerations, including social and political interfaces with the discipline. Usually we think of the practical dimension of accountability in terms of quality assurance. That is, we are concerned with demonstrating and maintaining assurance of a specified degree or type of quality in nursing practice. This can be accomplished by using the standards of the profession that are generally acknowledged to represent quality. However, to the extent that we demonstrate quality in practice in juxtaposition to the value and theoretical dimensions of accountability, I believe that we will achieve a more complete and socially meaningful degree of accountability.

The articles in this issue of *ANS* focus on the relationship between accountability and scholarship. They address problems of conceptual, theoretical, and empirical nature as they relate to accountability. This issue demonstrates both the strengths of our present

state of development as well as areas where further development is needed. The implications for practice are clear.

Peggy L. Chinn, RN, PhD, FAAN
Editor

Editor's Note:

Due to the receipt of a large volume of articles related to the topic of accountability, we are publishing two consecutive issues on this topic. This issue, Vol. 4:1, focuses on Accountability and Scholarship. The next issue, Vol. 4:2, focuses on Accountability and Practice. This change in the publication schedule has altered the publication dates for subsequent issues, and the deadline dates for submission of manuscripts for these issues. Please consult the "Information for Authors" section for information regarding these changes.

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