From the editor

FORMING AND INFORMING

The new and exciting field of nursing informatics is evolving with remarkable speed—a phenomenon consistent with the accelerated nature of the modern world. In this context, everything seems always slightly behind—"we need this yesterday" is an echoing refrain everywhere. The speed with which large volumes of information can be called forth is remarkable, with immense new possibilities lying just beyond the horizon of technological "catch-up."

The human capacity to deal with more in less time seems unlimited. At the same time, I wonder what our society might be unconsciously doing as we move in the direction of expanding this capacity, without asking fundamental questions concerning why? What? How? Nursing clearly needs better information, organized in ways that serve the interest of the discipline. The technology to organize and communicate information is already developed, if not yet refined and accessible. Still, the fundamental questions remain for the discipline—What information do we want to draw on? How will we define the terms? How will we obtain the information? How will we organize it? Toward what end? What are the philosophic and theoretic views that inform and shape these choices?

As the science and art of nursing informatics develops, these questions will persist and even grow in significance. In my view, if we are clear about the fundamental perspectives of the knowledge systems we develop, then our knowledge will begin to work for us, rather than enslaving us under the restrictions and limitations of the systems themselves. For example, if we make clear choices about the types of nursing care systems we want and need for nursing in the 21st century, then we can begin today to develop the type of knowledge systems that will bring that vision closer to reality. We can deliberately develop ways to incorporate knowledge about esoteric human interactions as fundamental to those systems. If we do not make these deliberate choices, some of the values and perspectives that we claim as important will become quickly extinct, invisible, and irretrievable.

These choices are the most important ones facing those scholars who are developing the science and art of nursing informatics. The articles in this issue of ANS (13:2) provide important insights concerning many of the fundamental issues. Every nurse, and every nurse scholar, can contribute to the development of this science and art by engaging in the discussions that inform the choices of informatics. I invite all readers of this important issue of ANS to join in this discussion, and to use the "Letters to the Editor" section of the journal as one avenue for this purpose.

—Peggy L. Chinn, RN, PhD, FAAN
Editor