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# From the editor

## SIGNS OF THE TIMES

I return home from the annual meeting of the American Academy of Nursing, energized by a sense of sharpened activist direction in this esteemed group, signaled in part by the announcement of the planned focus on gun control for the Fall 1993 annual meeting. Later in the evening, my phone rings. My friend's voice over the long-distance wire has an edge of panic. Her coworker, a nurse-midwife, has been murdered while driving home from the clinic at 2:00 AM. There were nine shots to her car and several more to her body after her attackers dragged her out of the car. There are reports of vandalism and hate graffiti back in the neighborhood around the clinic. It is 3 weeks before the election, with a major civil rights amendment on the state ballot. Maybe the events are related, my friend says; maybe not.

Violence related to political issues is not a new phenomenon, nor is it new for nurses to be victimized by political violence. What is emerging anew, however, is a growing awareness among nurses of the fundamental links between health, the expression of violence in society, the laws and policies that govern the use of violence, cultural mores that underpin violence, and responses to violence. The use of guns, and gun control as a political/legal issue, is, in and of itself, a symptom of more fundamental issues. However, guns speak a language that is universally understood. Guns symbolically represent power and the use of power, a powerful political force for nations, and a powerful coercive force for individuals and communities. In a cultural and social context of violence, power is the theory, guns are the practice.

This issue of *Advances in Nursing Science* (15:3) includes important works that begin to draw theoretical and scientific links between problems that plague societies worldwide and the foundational

dynamics that sustain and perpetuate unhealthy social conditions. Nurses, committed to health and well-being for all, have distinct opportunities on many levels to address social and political problems in arenas that make a difference in people's daily lives. Nurses bear witness to the suffering imposed by inadequate social conditions. Nurses suffer with those who are the victims of social neglect and of political failure to provide basic resources for individuals within a community. Most important, nurses work diligently to alleviate the suffering, to find both interim and lasting solutions, and to address the larger social and political inadequacies that lead to the suffering of millions of people worldwide.

As with all problems that we encounter in practice, nurses need knowledge that does not yet exist to better engage in meaningful practice that addresses social and political issues. The knowledge of our discipline cannot be limited only to that which concerns individuals apart from their social and cultural and political context. Development of knowledge of the discipline includes the development of methods to understand health and well-being within context, as well as knowledge of context itself.

The articles in this issue of *ANS* build on rich foundations of social, political, and cultural theory already recognized as part of the discipline of nursing. These articles also challenge the discipline to move to new awareness, to develop new insights and new knowledge of culture, society, and politics. I invite you, as a reader, to write in response to the articles in this issue and to add to the dialogue of these linkages within our discipline. Our dialogue is itself a cultural, social, and political act that will contribute to directions for the future of nursing science, art, and practice.

—Peggy L. Chinn, RN, PhD, FAAN  
Editor