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[Vulnerability and Empowerment: Part II: From the Editor]

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From the Editor

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Editor

Frequently I hear colleagues objecting to the word "empowerment" as a fad, a trend, a trite term that carries little meaning, partly because it carries so many diverse meanings. The problem with these objections is that I have not yet found more suitable alternative terms to describe the processes by which people (including nurses) become able to act from a source of inner strength, able to sustain against odds large and small, and capable of taking matters into their own hands. The thesaurus gives synonyms like enable, endow, authorize, endow with power, invest with power, power up, put teeth into, arm, and strengthen. Needless to say, although some of these terms might suit in some limited situations, none seem adequate to describe the processes that we seek in nursing.

Another frequent discussion that I hear concerns whether one empowers others or can only empower one's self. Are we not caught in a destruction "either/or" perspective when we dwell on such questions? I believe that we are, and call for acknowledgment of the urgency of taking all necessary steps to facilitate and assist others to become able to act from a source of strength, to set the stage, to celebrate the efforts to be powerful and empowered on one's own behalf.

The most important concern around these issues involves the question: "Who benefits if we eschew the concept of empowerment?" Certainly, if nurses spend time and energy debating the worth of this term, our efforts are not spent pursuing the important work that brings about new possibilities for the kind of action that resists and overcomes dangers and vulnerabilities that interfere with health and well-being. When our own interests and well-being as nurses are at stake, we cannot afford to quibble over the nuances of meaning in a term for which there is no good alternative. Likewise, when the interests and well-being of those whose vulnerabilities we seek to ameliorate are at stake, we sacrifice important opportunities by dismissing a dynamic that could make a world of difference.

As one who loves words, and as one who searches for precise conceptual meaning, I certainly do not mean to dismiss debates over the idea of empowerment as meaningless forays into a semantic jungle. Serious discussions and explorations that lead toward new insights and possibilities, and searches for more meaningful terms and phrases are commendable. But when we are party to a

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passing dismissal of a term or phrase such as empowerment, it behooves us to stop and ask deeper questions concerning the social, political, and health consequences of embracing the concept or rejecting it.

The articles in this and the previous issue of *Advances in Nursing Science* (ANS) provide important insights concerning both vulnerabilities and empowerment. They raise important issues and present important findings that can expand our collective understanding and appreciation of the challenges that people face in seeking health and well-being. The work of these authors deserves our serious attention and consideration.

Peggy L. Chinn

RN, PhD, FAAN

Editor

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