
From the Editor

THE DISCIPLINE OF NURSING

The idea of “discipline” has been on my mind recently, having spent some extended time with 2 different sets of toddlers and their parents over the past several weeks. Of course, each set of parents deals with discipline in entirely different ways, but their balancing act is the same—the ever-present tension between constraint and freedom.

It occurred to me that in fact, this is the same tension that could be thought of as characterizing the different but related concept of a scientific discipline. The discipline is distinguished by the social and cultural constraints that are imposed both externally and internally. The definition of the science, the phenomena on concern, the group’s collectively accepted knowledge, the accepted methods and practices—all form a structure, without which the discipline would be indistinguishable.

At the same time, if these constraints were sufficiently restricting the freedom to explore, respond to societal change, and propose and act on cutting-edge inspirations, the discipline would wither and die. The group can sustain itself over time only if there is a considerable value placed on the work of those who demonstrate the creativity and capability to branch out into uncharted territory and explore that which at first lies outside the accepted norms.

This issue of *ANS* represents a particularly strong contribution to the kind of exploration that challenges many of the constraints of our discipline. Several of the articles advance perspectives that are not yet widely familiar

within nursing, and some elicit strong controversy, even objection. There is a particularly important collection of articles in the electronic section of this issue that addresses the focus of the discipline of nursing. Here you will find the most recent work of several scholars who have written classic works on the focus of the discipline, with new insights that advance their prior thinking. In addition, you will find the work of scholars whose work has not previously been published on this topic, bringing important challenges, critiques, and possibilities to light for all to consider.

The kind of debate and controversy that exists related to matters such as the focus on the discipline of nursing is a signal of the vital health of our discipline. It signifies the fact that nursing is not stagnant and overly constrained by preconceived assumptions. It signifies an intellectual maturity that is required collectively to advance the discipline. Not all perspectives put forth in a journal article find a receptive audience. But the fact that all of these perspectives are expressed and available for open debate gives the entire audience the opportunity to weigh the merits of each. It is the collective audience that determines the emerging standards and the accepted and prevailing points of view and, over time, reshapes the constraints of the discipline.

Surely this issue of *ANS* will inspire many readers to lend their points of view to the discussions that are presented here. Send us your letters! We will publish them in future issues of the journal.

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