
From the Editor

INFORMATICS AND TECHNOLOGY

In my editorial for *ANS* (26:4), late in 2003, I addressed the challenges that nurses face if we are to be major contributors to the health of populations worldwide in the age of the World Wide Web. In this issue of *ANS*, we turn to the broader concepts of informatics and technology, and I want to return to one of the issues that I addressed in that 2003 editorial—the shift in literacy demands for the present and future.

An electronic literacy generation gap is widely recognized between nurses recently entering the field and many of their educators and clinical mentors. Nurses in the academic world perceive this gap in dramatic ways, decrying the inability of young students to read, write, and spell in print-based media—to engage in all the skills that many in the older generation see as the skills of those who are literate. At the same time, we still encounter some students, and some colleagues, who resist using the computer, even e-mail, and who discount any information that might be obtained on the Internet. Seasoned practicing nurses tend not to experience quite as stark a generational gap, primarily because they have not been able to retain their employment unless they learn and use a variety of Web-based tools and internal information systems.

Regardless of our electronic literacy level, older generation nurses are only beginning to realize that our preconceived, print-based notions of literacy are being transformed and will be replaced by expectations, standards, and skills that we are gradually beginning to acquire and appreciate. Spender,¹ who believes that the over-40 generations are probably the last of those to be solely print-proficient, observed in 1995: “What we have to see is that we are the only

generation which will know both mediums, the print and the electronic. We are the ones who will be able to make comparison, who will be able to assess, evaluate and transfer our experience, expertise—and wisdom—from the old forms to the new.”²(pxxvi)

Rather than view this divide as a “gap” and a tension, I would call on all of us to come to our tasks with an open mind that draws on the insights and skills of those who have advanced print literacy, as well as those whose skills now approach an advanced level of electronic literacy. Our mutual challenge is to transfer the wisdom granted by the old forms of literacy to the new and retain as much of the richness, depth, and insight as we possibly can.

Spender credits Florence Nightingale as one who declared that without the book, women would be in danger of dying of intellectual starvation.¹(pxxxi) Likewise I believe that nursing today will be in danger of dying if we do not fully embrace, use, and become proficient in the new information technologies. The authors of the articles that appear in this issue of *ANS* have made remarkable contributions to keeping nursing, and nurses, at the forefront of this new frontier in nursing and healthcare. I hope their work will inspire and challenge all of us to reach for yet another level of understanding and proficiency.

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

REFERENCE

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1. Spender D. *Nattering on the Net: Women, Power and Cyberspace*. North Melbourne, Australia: Spinifex Press; 1995.