
From the Editor

NURSING AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Many years ago, I heard Marge Piercy describe politics as the ability to exercise your values in the world. Piercy was discussing her writings with a group of faculty and students and describing the feminist concepts embedded in her work. Piercy has written a number of engaging novels that explore various dimensions of women's experience in the world. One of her earliest novels *Woman on the Edge of Time* was written after she witnessed first hand the flood of letters that her friend Phyllis Chesler received in response to her 1972 ground-breaking book *Women and Madness*.¹ In her novel, *Woman on the Edge of Time*, Piercy² depicts a woman committed to in-patient psychiatric care after beating up her niece's pimp in an attempt to save her niece. To cope with the horrendous conditions of her life and her imprisonment on a psychiatric ward, she time travels to a nonsexist world of the future where she works her way through possibilities for survival.

Reading one heartrending letter after another from women who read Chesler's *Women and Madness* was a life-altering experience for Piercy and the others sorting through the barrage of mail. The women who wrote the letters recognized in the book their own experience of victimization by prevailing social, political, and personal mental health practices and were compelled to share their own stories to affirm the truth of what Chesler recounted in her book. In the talk that I heard Piercy giving several years later, she recounted how both her fiction and her poetry were political acts—ways to exercise values that are grounded in women's experience and women's vision of a preferred future.

Every time I hear (nurses in particular say) something like "I am not political," I think of Marge Piercy's stunning definition of what it means to be political. By virtue of being a nurse, we have assumed a commitment that is inherently political—a commitment to abide by a code of ethics that respects the dignity of all people and the right of all people to receive health care in their time of need. We also acquire a body of knowledge that serves as a powerful tool that can be used for the good of humankind and a forum from which to advocate for the humane and caring treatment for all. By performing our daily obligations as nurses, we exercise our values in the world. We can, and indeed we must, use our privilege as nurses on behalf of human rights.

The authors who have contributed to this issue of *ANS* bring to the fore many of the challenges that nurses and health care providers face in exercising our obligations. These articles expand our understandings of the complex issues that surround health and human rights and challenge us to reconsider and recommit our efforts on behalf of those we serve. I hope that you will contribute to the conversations that these authors introduce.

—Peggy L. Chinn, PhD, RN, FAAN
Editor

REFERENCES

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1. Chesler P. *Women and Madness*. New York, NY: Doubleday; 1972.
 2. Piercy M. *Woman on the Edge of Time*. New York, NY: Fawcett Crest; 1976.

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