Editorial

50th Anniversary Editorial: Building on firm foundations

The first issue of the International Journal of Nursing Studies (IJNS) was published in December 1963. The world was very different. The ‘cold war’ was at its height and Europe was divided between East and West, symbolised by the division of Berlin by the “wall” which had been erected in 1961. In that year President Kennedy was assassinated and two days later his alleged killer, Lee Harvey Oswald, was murdered by nightclub owner Jack Ruby. Lyndon Johnson became US President and the number of US military ‘advisors’ in Vietnam reached 15,000. British politics was rocked by the Profumo scandal, in which the Secretary of War was found to be having an affair with Christine Keeler who was, in turn involved with the Soviet Naval Attaché. On the other side of the world there was the first federal election for Indigenous people in Western Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory; indigenous voting rights in other states had been in place since 1949. In China Mao Zedong launched the Socialist Education Movement following the failure of the Great Leap Forward, setting the stage for the Cultural Revolution that was to follow. In South America, Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara continued to preach the role of armed revolution after being active in several armed revolutions, including the one which established Cuba’s communist government.

The Civil Rights Movement in the US led to violent reactions from white racists; George Wallace the new governor of Alabama blocked black students from enrolling in the all white University of Alabama and speaking from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, civil rights leader Martin Luther King gave his impassioned ‘I have a dream’ speech. The era of colonialism was coming to an end and in Africa Kenya, Zanzibar and Nigeria gained their independence from European colonial powers. The Organisation for African Unity was established with the express aim of decolonising the remaining white colonies of Rhodesia, South Africa, Mozambique and Angola.

Films released in that year included Fellini’s masterpiece “8½” (Italy), John Sturges’ “the Great Escape” (US) and Akira Kurosawa’s “The Ransom” (Japan). Popular TV programmes in the US and Europe included Lassie and The Virginian; the first episode of Dr Who was shown, which went on to become the longest running TV science fiction series. Fashionable women wore fur boots and towering hairdo’s and Beatlemania had arrived following the release of I Want To Hold Your Hand and I Saw Her Standing There. The average cost of a new house in the US in 1963 was $12,650. In the UK it was £3160, which, if you were wealthy, might have left you enough to buy a new Ford Cortina for £675.

When the IJNS was first published smallpox in humans and rinderpest in cattle, two of the most infectious agents in the world, presented a major threat to human health and the food supply. They are now both eradicated. Big steps have also been made to eradicate poliomyelitis which remains endemic in only four countries (India, Nigeria, Afghanistan and Pakistan) and dracunculiasis (guinea worm disease) which is now restricted to only five countries (Chad, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mali and Sudan) (De Cock, 2011). Since 1963 a host of new transmissible diseases have been described including HIV, haemorrhagic fevers such as the Hanta Virus, and airborne-transmitted infections like severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS). Well known diseases like TB, that seemed to have been consigned to history in the developed world have reemerged as global public health problems as drug-resistance has developed. Many health initiatives have been launched, influential reports published and philanthropic organisations founded which have realigned the focus of health initiatives.

1. Looking backwards, looking forward: special issues for 2013

As part of our 50th Anniversary volume we will continue to address the challenges, new and old, that preoccupy those charged with delivering nursing and midwifery care to the world’s population. In addition to our regular issues of general content we have commissioned a number of special issues that focus on issues of global importance. The world’s cultures, economics, politics and patterns of health and disease have changed markedly since publication of the first edition of the IJNS and yet a review of the most highly cited papers over the
past five decades reveals a consistent set of issues which have received the attention of successive generations of researchers.

Preparation of nurses for clinical practice has been a focus of many papers. Indeed the first ever paper published in the IJNS was by Patricia O’Connell (1963) a Health Visitor Tutor based at the University of Southampton, UK who made the case for the educated nurse and the merits of university based nurse education. It was not until almost 30 years later, following the Project 2000 (1986) initiative, that university based education became the norm for British nurses with the minimum qualification set at Diploma (associate degree) level. A university degree as the minimum qualification for British nurses will be introduced in 2013 – a fact which colleagues based outside the UK often find astounding, a whole 50 years following publication of O’Connell’s paper. The progress towards graduate entry nurses in the UK contrasts sharply with bold steps by some other European countries, Australia, China and elsewhere to drive forward the development of professional nursing and midwifery through education.

In the intervening decades the IJNS has been active in building the case for educated nurses who can apply best evidence to their practice (Griffiths, 2008). Two highly cited studies, one in the UK (Bryar et al., 2003) and one in Australia (Retsas and Nolan, 1999), investigated the barriers faced by nurses applying research in their practice. Both studies called for fundamental changes within the education system to improve the teaching of critical appraisal and research skills and changes to the organisation of nursing work to provide nurses with the time and support needed to apply research findings to practice. It is disappointing to note that a recent Swedish study shows that nursing students still have only a ‘modest’ intention to use research evidence in practice (Forsman et al., 2012).

What good is published research if the findings are not implemented for the benefit of patients? As part of our 50th Anniversary celebrations we will publish a Special Issue on Implementation Science guest edited by Theo van Achterberg (Radboud University Nijmegen) and Anne Sales (VA Ann Arbor Healthcare System, USA), which will inform the systematic uptake of clinical research findings and other evidence-based practices into routine practice.

Closely related to the education and professional development of nurses and midwives, the IJNS has established itself as the journal of first choice for research papers concerned with the healthcare workforce. Some of the most highly cited papers in most decades of the IJNS have concerned the nursing workforce. The IJNS has also published many papers on nursing leadership and continues to do so with recent papers including Laschinger et al.’s (2012) investigation of the impact of authentic leadership on staff outcomes, Andrews et al.’s (2012) investigation of leadership style and Cummings et al.’s (2010) review of leadership styles and their differential effects on the nursing workforce and work environments. A second IJNS Special Issue, released as part of our 50th Anniversary celebrations, guest edited by Linda Aiken (University of Pennsylvania, USA) and Koen Van den Heede (Belgian Healthcare Knowledge Centre), brings together findings from a major EU funded nursing workforce study (RN4Cast), which seeks to establish how hospital nurse staffing, skill mix, educational composition, and quality of the nurse work environment impact hospital mortality, failure to rescue, quality of care, and patient satisfaction.

Trends in child, maternal and adult death rates have changed the pattern of disease and the nature of the work of professional nurses and midwives. Child death rates tumbled by around 45% between 1970 and 2002 and a further 52% between 1970 and 2010 but this trend is patchy; today 33% of deaths of children <5 years of age now occur in southwest Asia and 50% in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in west Africa (De Cock, 2011). At the start of the 21st Century three health related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs 4, 5 and 6) were identified relating to child health, maternal health and HIV, TB and malaria. MDG 5 calls for a 75% reduction in global maternal mortality ratio from 1990 to 2015, and universal access to services such as family planning. On current estimates neither of these objectives are likely to be achieved within the timescale. As part of the IJNS 50th Anniversary celebrations we recognise the crucial importance of child health through publication of an IJNS Child Health Special Issue guest edited by Linda Franck (University of California, San Francisco, USA) and Sanna Salanterä (University of Turku, Finland).

Chronic diseases associated with ageing, and associated treatment costs, have emerged over the past 50 years as a major issue for developed and developing nations alike and a decline in traditional family care of older people has shifted the responsibility for care towards nurses and other formal carers. Older people are our future, quite literally, but the capabilities required to provide high quality nursing for this patient group is too often underestimated. Recent papers published in the IJNS to inform older people’s nursing include those on hydration of older people (Godfrey et al., 2012), pain assessment and management (Manias, 2012) and a study of student nurses’ career preferences for working in this specialty (Stevens, 2011). In our 50th Anniversary year the IJNS will build on these and other studies with our fourth special of the year, on the Care of Older People, edited by Jan Hammers (Maastricht University, The Netherlands) and Elizabeth Capenzuti (New York University College of Nursing, USA).

2. A programme for nursing research and the future for the IJNS

Publishing research to inform nursing practice has been a particular priority for us, the current editors. While many of the most highly cited papers published in the IJNS in previous decades were clinical research papers, they were often based on relatively small scale studies, sometimes carried out by individuals as a requirement for a university degree. Fifty years later nursing and midwifery continues to suffer from far too few research programmes which build on research findings incrementally. Nevertheless, there are some clinical topics covered by papers in the IJNS which taken together resemble the outcomes of a research programme.
One such topic is pressure ulcer prevention, which is a major focus of nursing care in many settings and has emerged in recent years as a potentially sensitive outcome measure of the quality of nursing care. Almost 40 years ago Gerson’s (1975) study established the incidence of pressure ulcers in a sample of 5648 patients in three Canadian hospitals and found that older patients, long stay patients and those with neoplastic disease, diseases of the circulatory system and those who had accidents were over-represented in the pressure ulcer group. More recent studies have investigated the causes of pressure ulcers; for example the relationship between friction and pressure and pressure ulcers (Lahmann and Kottner, 2011), the relationship between weight and pressure ulcers (Kottner et al., 2011) and factors related to the development of pressure ulcers in recipients of home care services (Tsai et al., 2011). Other studies have investigated how pressure sores can be prevented; for example, Defloor et al.’s (2005) study of the impact of turning and pressure relieving devices in reducing the incidence of pressure ulcers (see also Beeckman et al., 2011). Beeckman et al.’s (2012) evaluation of the impact of an electronic clinical decision support system on pressure ulcer prevention and several studies of the contribution of pressure relieving support services (McInnes et al., 2012a; b; Demarré et al., 2012). And we have also published studies which have investigated how pressure ulcers can be measured and assessed; for example, Kottner et al.’s (2012) systematic review of paediatric pressure ulcer risk assessment scales. But such examples are, in truth, few and far between. We hope to see more of their like in the future.

Looking back over the past 50 years we feel privileged to have the opportunity to build on the fine traditions of the journal built by our predecessors and we are honoured to work today with such an excellent international Editorial Board and team of Associate Editors to take the Journal forward. So what’s the future for the IJNS in the years ahead? Over the past 50 years the IJNS has published excellent health services research which concerns the largest element of the healthcare workforce – nurses. It has achieved a distinctive place within the professional development of nursing as a practice discipline, but whilst retaining its special place within the historical development of nursing, it is now poised to fulfil wider ambitions.

In 2007 we set out the types of papers which were a priority for the IJNS to publish, and our views on this have not changed. Then, as now, we ‘welcome robust intervention studies and systematic reviews of such studies, particularly those that focus on the evaluation of clinical interventions . . . (and) . . . qualitative and correlational studies which are not simply descriptive but add understanding of a research topic or field or develop theory through analysis of their data’ (Norman, 2007). More recently we have built upon our vision for the future of the IJNS in the aims and scope which we revised in 2011 (Griffiths and Norman, 2011) and which is available at: http://www.journals.elsevier.com/international-journal-of-nursing-studies/. Over the next decade we expect to see the IJNS emerge as the journal of choice for researchers working at the interface between research which informs the practice of nursing and the wider health care research practice and policy communities. As the highest impact generalist nursing journal in the world the IJNS can offer authors exposure, impact and reach to an international, increasingly multi-disciplinary readership.

So Happy Birthday to the IJNS – life begins (again) at 50!

References


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