Historically-informed Nursing

The joy of attics and archives
Historically-informed nursing:

- Uses history as a context within which to understand contemporary nursing

- Answers questions about the past
  - Who are we?
  - How did we get here?

- While pointing us to the future
  - Who should we be?
  - Where are we going?
Who does historical research in nursing?

• Nurse historians
  • Nurses with PhDs in nursing or history

• Historians of nursing
  • Historians with PhDs in women’s history; labour history; medicine

• Lay historians + family chroniclers
• Masters & PhD students
• Archivists
Nurse historians aim to:

• Bring history into nursing
  • Convince nurses that history matters

• Bring nursing into history
  • Convince historians that nursing matters
What counts as “history”?

• Generally more than 50 years old
  • Allows understanding of broad socio-political context
  • Some records & photos sealed for 50 years after death of author

• Canadian nursing history is > 400 years old
  • Early French Catholic orders to New France (Quebec)
Community of scholars

- National Research Organizations
  - Canada, USA, UK
  - Israel, Africa, Brazil (emerging)
- Nursing history is a transnational history
  - Nightingale nurses
  - Missionaries
  - Philanthropies
  - ICN + WHO
Why nursing history? Nelson, 2010

- Prevent historical amnesia
- Bear witness
- Shape identity
Doing nursing history (Grypma, 2005)

Four Views

- Birds Eye View (Overview)
- Ground View
- Rear View
- Worldview
Birds eye view (Overview)

Seek out secondary sources

- Gives broad landscape
- Involves historiography
  - Knowing the literature
  - Understanding sociopolitical context
Birds eye view: China nurses

Study of China & Mission history

- Key events
  - War, revolution, disaster
- Key persons
  - Politicians, leaders
- Key institutions
  - Hospitals, universities
Ground view

Primary Sources

- The main “data”
  Provides “on the ground” vision (version) of an historical event or experiences as it unfolds

The thrill of discovery is the primary motivator for historians
Ground view: China nurses

Experiences of Canadian missionaries
- UC Observer ad
  - Letters, photos, diaries, film, artifacts
- UC Archives (Toronto)
  - Mission correspondence, reports & photos

Experiences of Chinese nurses trained by Canadians
- Few records available in China
  - Government & Institutional Archives
  - China, USA, Canada, UK
Rear view

Narratives compiled after the experience or event

- Are mitigated and reinterpreted with the passing of time
  - Oral histories
  - Memoirs
  - Autobiographies

- Usually tell us more about author than the event itself
  - Stories often are retold to pass along a moral message
Rear view: China nurses

Canadian missionary nurses
- Memoirs + autobiographies
- Recordings + interviews by others (all RNs are deceased)

Chinese nurses
- Oral interviews (2009)
- Working with Chinese historians conducting interviews
Worldview

Values and beliefs of researcher

- Important to recognize & acknowledge personal lens or bias that influences interpretation

History is subjective
Worldview: China nurses

- Influenced interests & questions asked of data
- Influenced access to private sources
  - Trust of family members of Canadian and Chinese nurses
Outcome

- Publications
  - Books
  - Articles
- Presentations
  - Conferences
  - Public presentations
- Documentary Film
- Museum Exhibit
- Digital Humanities
Challenges (Grypma, 2005)

• Finding a “worthy” subject
• Finding sufficient data
• Exploring the “truth” in data analysis
  • Ethical dilemmas
  • Using real names & places
  • Liking/ disliking your subject
• Writing a compelling report
  • Books, films, exhibits must be interesting for audience
Future of historical research

- Growing interest
  - 60 + years since WWII
- Growing urgency
  - Age of interviewees
- Growing sophistication
  - 2nd generation PhDs
- Growing foundation
  - Secondary sources
Fraser Health Research Day
June 2012