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Introduction

1.1 About This Book

Nursing is a dynamic and ever-changing profession and central to the provision of effective healthcare, as are other health-focused professions. In recent years the global shortage of a range of health professionals including nurses, nurse educators, researchers, and academics, and tensions between the professional aspirations of nurses and the growing dominance of financially driven health services may be having a significant impact how care is received and provided. It may be that health services, broken by the growing cost of health service delivery or government ineptitude or corporate greed, has promoted a proliferation of disturbing stories of clinical neglect and patient abuse, the apparent breakdown in professional standards in the face of the recent global pandemic, and unhealthy and unacceptable working conditions, paradoxically in parallel with vocal support for nurses and their role during the COVID-19 pandemic (Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety 2021). All this has seen the central place of care in nursing and the healthcare industry shift the moral imperative as caring has slipped, as the demands to do more and more, with less and less cripple nurses' (and other health professionals') capacity to care, or (perhaps) will, to practice with compassion and empathy.

Sandvik et al. (2021) is of the view that the application of care related theory is ill supported once students graduate and begin their working lives, leading to a care-focused theory-practice gap.

I have been a nurse for over 40 years, and while predominantly involved in clinical nursing and nursing education, I have also supported the design of several nursing curricula. On occasions they have included content related to the philosophy of nursing, models of nursing or nursing's history and development. All topics that help nursing students grasp the place their profession has in the delivery of healthcare and of the role nurses and nursing has, from an historical and philosophical standpoint. I have also been involved in teaching a range of other health professionals, and although my involvement has dealt predominantly with areas

of their professional development it has sometimes involved education in the areas of professionalism and their role as professional leaders.

With all the health professional education I have been involved in, little of it has focused on 'care' or how 'caring' is expressed by health professionals and my impression is that this is a topic that is either taken as a given within care-focused professions (such as nursing), or there is little need to explore care or caring as a concept because the concept is thought to be self-evident.

However, discussion of a detailed meaning of 'care', or 'caring' or the role care has in helping others grow, or heal or in supporting clients, patients, or the people at the heart of nursing care or the health service, is often scant or missing (Miller and Keane 1978). This is an old view, although I believe it remains valid today. I wonder too if, as nursing clambered for professional status, something of the art of nursing, of the heart of nursing was lost, neglected, or dismissed as trivial or tied to the 'women's business,' and the mysticism of nursing's past and origins.

Fearing that understanding or even discussing care will somehow diminish the advances made by nurses towards professional status, 'care' – the thing at the centre of nursing (Watson 1979; Leininger 1991, 2001), has been relegated to a glib cliché as Woodward (1997) claims however I feel 'care' is more relevant today, than the emphasis focused on the instrumental element of care, to the detriment of the nursing profession. Care seems to have been relegated to a by-word for nursing that requires no further insight, or it is used as an isolated expression, as if no understanding beyond the obvious were needed. Leininger (one of nursing's great philosophers) said in 1984, '*Caring is nursing, and nursing is caring*,' as if no further explanation were needed. Watson (another master nursing philosopher) said in 1979, '*Caring is the essence of nursing*.' I have to say I agree, but if caring is the essence, why is it that education about care, or discussions of what it means to care, and how care can be recognised, or what benefits there are from care, are sometimes missing from the education and instruction of nurses and other health professionals?

Radsma (1994, p. 444) proposed several questions about caring that I believe remain unanswered. She asked, 'Is caring presumed to be a given in nursing?' And 'Caring can exist without nursing, but can there be nursing without caring?' Radsma's (1994) paper reminds us that caring can be seen as an ethic (Kurtz and Wang 1991; Fry 1988), from a scientific perspective (Dunlop 1986; Watson 1979), as the core or essence of nursing (Leininger 1991; Ritchie 1987). It can be viewed from a historical perspective (Reverby 1987), a feminist perspective (Hagell 1989; Condon 1992), in terms of an anthropology bent (Leininger 1991), from a theological standpoint (Roach 1984), from a philosophical perspective (Mayeroff 1990; Benner and Wrubel 1998), and from a psychological standpoint (Watson 1979).

Radsma (1994) and Smith (1990) suggest that in terms of understanding conceptualising and describing 'care' and 'caring', nursing faces a dilemma, that I believe remains unresolved.

One concern in addressing the concept of ‘care’ from the perspective of the function of nurses is that it may imply that this is all nurses do and as such it is employed by groups (politicians, doctors and some other health professionals or the public) who do not understand what it is that nurses do, who then use ‘caring’ as a tool to reduce the significance of nursing activity and the value of care, down to a simplistic narrative about what nursing is and what nurses do, with this sort of misunderstanding used to diminish the recognition and value of the vital role nurses provide across the health service (Jackson et al. 2021). Nurses make up approximately 60% of the healthcare workforce across the world (WHO 2019, 2020) and as such understanding their contribution to the health service through ‘care’ or ‘carework’ is vital.

This book sets out to redress this oversight and to add a range of perspectives and information so this neglect can be corrected. The book is aimed at undergraduate nurses and other health professionals and maybe of use for a range of practicing nurses and health professionals. It begins with an oversight of definitions and with theories of care explored in Chapter 2; Chapter 3 explores what professional caring might look like, expanding on the concepts of instrumental care, expressive care, and discussing transformational care, as well as the types of caring central to healthcare provision. Chapter 4 considers the attributes of caring required for the provision of transformational care. Chapter 5 outlines the context of professional care and explores what challenges impact on the delivery of care in the health arena. Chapter 6 offers an overview of the therapeutic relationship and why this matters for the provision of professional care, while Chapter 7 defines and elaborates upon three key aspects of care: compassion, empathy, and sympathy, as well as outlining compassion fatigue, compassionate leadership, and congruent leadership. Chapter 8 explores the issues of self-care and self-compassion as well as considering why caring presents several challenges such as the difficulties of bullying and horizontal violence within nursing (in particular) and strategies for fostering greater self-care.

Throughout the book the meaning of care from a nursing and midwifery perspective is outlined, and the component parts of care are expressed from the perspective of the healing and healthcare arts.

Reflective Activity 1:

Before you read on – think about how you practice ‘care’.
How do you ‘care’ in your daily professional practice?
Who do you care for in your professional practice? (This is not as simple a question as you might think. Did you think of yourself? If not, why not?).
Where did you learn to care, or was it something that is innate to you or your professional responsibilities?

