

## **Editorial**

### **Wanted: Family Nursing Interventions**

Determined, persistent journal editor seeks specific descriptions of nursing practice with families: rich clinical exemplars, case studies, process research, outcome research, questions and answers about the effectiveness of family nursing interventions.

With this issue, Volume 1 of the *Journal of Family Nursing* is complete. The mission of this journal is centered on the unique intersection between understanding family functioning in health and illness and providing professional nursing care to families based on that understanding. At the heart of the intersection, both areas of knowledge inform the nursing of families equally; an either/or focus on one or the other limits our effectiveness as a discipline. Nursing is a practice profession with a primary goal to alleviate suffering and promote health. In a recent publication, Wright and Bell (1994) argued that the most important work nurses can do is that which will help patients and their families prevent, manage, overcome, or live alongside their health problems. What do those studies about family functioning suggest we should be *doing* to be helpful to families? I believe that the *Journal of Family Nursing* needs a stronger emphasis on the specifics of helping and healing families by examining, in detail, those caring interventions that alleviate suffering and promote health. We need to be less tentative and more self-assured about our competence to assist families, and we need to talk more about it, study more about it, and write more about it!

The manuscripts that have come across my editorial desk over the past 18 months have primarily focused on research that seeks to understand family members' response to health and illness. Where are the rich descriptions of practice? In-depth descriptions of the nursing of families or research about family nursing practice have comprised less than 20% of the 62 submitted manuscripts and a mere 18% of the 17 articles published in this first volume.

Many explanations have been offered for this imbalance: Nursing science is still young; academics who submit the manuscripts are not always clinicians; clinicians are not always writers; nursing activity has traditionally occurred "behind closed doors" and has rarely been open to examination by peers; we talk a lot about what we do, but we infrequently observe practice as it occurs; and nurses have lacked familiarity with the practice literature outside of nursing. Although we could all contribute to the chorus of lament about what constrains us, let us celebrate what we have accomplished and look at the challenges ahead.

We have begun the search for a common language to describe family nursing intervention. Craft and Willadsen's (1992) research using a Delphi process identified nine categories of family nursing intervention. Further work is needed to articulate specifically what the nurse does when he or she intervenes with families. Art Frank's "Further Reflections on Illness," in this issue, piercingly describes a consumer's view of family nursing competence.

Conceptually, although we attempt to define what constitutes a family intervention, it is important to acknowledge the bidirectional influence of an intervention: The responses of a nurse are invited by the responses of the client/family, which in turn are invited by the responses of a nurse (Wright & Leahey, 1994). Future descriptions need to account for this bidirectional influence. We are ready to move beyond viewing intervention as a unidirectional process of the nurse "doing to" the client/ family. Another conceptual question for future consideration is, "What distinguishes basic from advanced practice with families?"

In the domain of research, Gilliss and Davis (1993) conducted a meta-analysis of family intervention studies and showed that family intervention does have a positive effect. However, unresolved questions about what constitutes a family outcome remain. Several authors have identified the conceptual and methodological issues associated with outcome in family research (Feetham, 1992; Jacobson, 1988; Knafl, 1992). However, there is more to the effectiveness question than outcome alone. Jennings (1991) recently supported this idea by noting that nursing outcome research has measured only client behaviors, with little consideration given to the nurse's behavior.

A new wave of intervention researchers outside of nursing have called for a focus beyond the results of intervention to examine what happens inside the intervention (Greenberg, 1986, 1991; Johnson & Greenberg, 1988; Pinosof, 1989). The emphasis moves from the result of the intervention on the client to include the process during the intervention and requires capturing the nurse-client interaction so that both language and behavior might be analyzed. This focus on process has tremendous promise for addressing three critical needs: (a) a common language for family nursing interventions, (b) a rich description and consensus about the interventions themselves, and (c) the usefulness of the interventions identified.

In my February 1995 editorial (Bell, 1995), I called for "the voices from practice who can describe innovative family assessment and intervention." Where are you? I am still calling. The world of family nurses is still waiting to hear from you.  
Janice M. Bell, R.N., Ph.D. *Editor*

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