Editorial

Reflections on the 5th International Family Nursing Conference, Chicago

The 5th International Family Nursing Conference in Chicago, hosted by the University of Illinois at Chicago and ably organized under the leadership of Drs. Kathy Knafl and Suzanne Feetham, took place from July 19 to 22, 2000, at the downtown Chicago Marriott. The conference provided a forum for more than 550 nurses from 20 countries to share their research findings and ideas about family nursing theory, practice, education, and policy. Maturana and Varela (1992, p. 23) have written that reflection is the moment when we become aware of that part of ourselves which we cannot see in any other way. Here, then, are my reflections about this important meeting.

We are kindred spirits. Throughout the conference, there was a tone of excitement and energy about being with colleagues who shared a common understanding and mission. There was no need to explain why family is important in health and illness. There was no need to defend the inclusion of multiple family members in research or practice or theory. There was no need to lobby that the family influences, and is influenced by, both the individual family members and larger systems. There was no need to argue for more inclusion and openness in how one defines family. There was no need to persuade colleagues that family content needs to be an integral part of the education of future practitioners. As one participant delightedly remarked, "I can actually use the f word around here."

We are advancing the science of the nursing of families. Throughout the posters, papers, symposia, and preconference workshops, I observed growth in our knowledge about the nursing of families. We are at a different level than at previous conferences. There was evidence of building on what we already know: moving toward more consistency between conceptualization and method in our family research, using previous descriptions of phenomena to design and test interventions, and applying these findings to practice educational and social policy development. Gone are the days when someone from the audience questioned the appropriateness of nursing's interest in the impact of illness on the marital relationship.

There was also evidence of the globalization of family nursing. For example, symposia participants from Brazil, Japan, and Sweden spoke about their efforts to include family in nursing research and practice as well as to influence family health policy in their countries. We have lots of work ahead, and there is work for everyone.

We are maturing. Along with our growing knowledge about families in health and illness and the advances this knowledge is making in nursing practice with families, I observed the wisdom of aging. I visited with colleagues I have not seen since the Chile conference in 1997 and several I have not seen since the Montreal conference in 1994. We are looking older, which invited me to have conversations about midlife, family and career transitions, hormones, and death. I also had conversations about finding a place of satisfaction and meaning in one's work, about the pride of having former students presenting at the conference, and about making a difference in the world. One of the highlights of the meeting for me was an early breakfast meeting of editorial board members of the Journal of Family Nursing. I looked around the table and experienced
profound reverence and gratitude for those who have significantly influenced this emerging specialty called family nursing.

This conference inspired renewed commitment to continue to advance the field of family nursing. The integrative reviews offered direction for future research. Ideas from a keynote address led one participant to remark, "I will teach family nursing differently this year." Discovering others who work with similar populations provided new opportunities for networking and knowledge building. Another participant said, "I will go home with renewed energy to write about my research findings." There was a strong sense that the conference offered clarity about the mission and the useful contribution that each of us is making to the nursing of families. At the closing ceremonies, a group of nurses from the University of Botswana invited us to join them at the 6th International Family Nursing Conference in 2003. I hope that the spirit and energy of the Chicago conference sustains your important work with and on behalf of families.

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REFERENCE