



Foreword

Promoting Health in Families: Applying Family Research and Theory to Nursing Practice (Bomar, P.J., 2004)

Few would disagree that a profound, reciprocal relationship exists between families and health. The most recent integrative reviews of nursing research with families (Gilliss & Knafel, 1999; Knafel & Gilliss, 2002; McCubbin, 1999) have documented the many ways that nursing research has creatively and substantively extended the conversation about the reciprocal impact of normative and nonnormative transitions on families. That families play an important role in the promotion, protection, and maintenance of health (including recovery from illness) has been even more strongly supported in a major integrative review by Weihs, Fisher, and Baird (2002). Family factors affecting the management and outcomes of a variety of chronic illnesses were identified from the research literature. The authors summarized their findings using the epidemiological language of family "protective and risk factors" (p. 15) that have been documented in recent studies. It is noteworthy that while intrafamilial conflict and criticism were among several family processes identified as risk factors, family communication, clear family organization, congruent beliefs within the family, and even family time for recreation were among several significant family processes that serve as protective factors (Weihs et al., 2002). In this third edition of *Promoting Health in Families*, Dr. Bomar has invited a group of distinguished contributors who argue persuasively and intentionally that families *do* conserve wellness in a variety of ways across the life span, across cultures, and across the health/illness continuum.

The nursing profession consistently distinguishes "individual," "family," and "community" as distinct systems levels for both assessment and intervention. Bomar's third edition joins an increasing number of textbooks written by nurses for nurses that focus on the family (Denham, 2003; Friedman, Bowden, & Jones, 2003; Hanson, 2001; Wright & Leahey, 2000; Wright, Watson, & Bell, 1996). Despite definitions of family that increasingly account for varied family forms and structures, I believe "family" is a misnomer. What intrigues many of us about "family" is the influence that *significant relationships* have on the experience of health and illness. We say family, when what we really mean is relationships.

Our understanding of the bidirectional influence between relationships and health and wellbeing is growing. However, we are still at only a beginning stage in our efforts to develop a body of knowledge about how the nurse might assess and intervene at the level of relationships in ways that will promote health and make demonstrable differences in the lives of individuals, families, and communities. Promoting health at the level of relationships, I believe, exists across a continuum of nursing care both in community-based prevention efforts and in contexts where nurses encounter suffering and, more specifically, relationship suffering in the experience of illness. Families, undoubtedly, are at the center of nursing efforts that acknowledge, strengthen, sustain, and alter relationships with the goal of promoting health.

This third edition challenges and extends our thinking about the linkages between relationships and health and honors the bidirectional influence that exists. Descriptions of nursing practice for promoting health are included. I am thrilled that Dr. Bomar chose

to include Canadian content in this third edition of *Promoting Health in Families*. In doing so, she convincingly acknowledges that the world of family nursing is without borders and that international relationships promote health within the discipline!

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