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Nursing Education in Jesuit Universities and Colleges



The Art and Science of Caring

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Nursing as an occupation is very old. In fact, some nursing historians point to Phoebe, the bearer of Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans, as the first nurse; and even though Florence Nightingale founded modern nursing in the 1800's, its roots were still firmly planted in religious tradition. Its emphasis on service and subservience rather than autonomy and independent thought fostered nursing's reputation as vocation rather than profession.

Nursing as a scientific discipline is very new. In fact, though the first Ph.D. program in nursing was initiated in 1934, there were only five extant in 1967. Today, there are 56 doctoral programs in nursing in the United States. Nursing education has evolved from three-year hospital-based programs where courses were taught primarily by physicians to college and university-based pro-

grams where, today, nursing courses are taught by academically credentialed nurses. At the undergraduate level, nursing is an academic major much as chemistry or philosophy are majors. Eighteen of the 28 Jesuit colleges and universities offer the bachelor of science in nursing degree, 6 offer the master of science in nursing degree, and 3 offer the doctoral degree in nursing. Contemporary nursing with its emphasis on physical, spiritual, and emotional health, or in other words, the whole person, is uniquely related to the Jesuit mission. Nursing, it has been said, is the Jesuit mission. There is the emphasis on academic excellence. Consistent with the Jesuit ideal of intellectual mastery of subject matter, nursing students are held to rigorous academic standards. The nursing student must integrate the liberal arts and sciences with the major in nursing and must develop the critical thinking skills necessary to the study of human responses to illness.

It is the rare nurse who creates technology, yet it is almost every

nurse who must use the sophisticated, life-sustaining machinery so prevalent in our illness care system. It is the nurse who is challenged to nurture the human person whose life depends upon the machinery. While recognizing the contributions which technology makes to the quality of human life, the competent and compassionate nurse also recognizes the threat to human dignity which it poses. Throughout the nurse's education, the nursing faculty encourages integration of knowledge from the sciences and the humanities with nursing knowledge, assisting the student to gain increasing skill in differentiating between needs of self and the good of others.

The nurse whose education has been value-oriented, another hallmark of Jesuit education, is able to humanize care because he or she can draw upon an understanding of the complexity which comprises each individual. The philosophy of every nursing program in Jesuit institutions cites a belief in the dignity and worth of each person. And though the nurse's values may be di-

ametrically opposed to the values of those in his or her care, the motivated novice and the expert clinician never lose sight of their purpose which is to care for those who actively seek their assistance as well as to deliver care to those who are disenfranchised and unable to access care. Every student in a nursing practicum is occasionally confronted with the conflict which occurs when the student's values are in direct opposition to those of the person being nursed. It is this occasion which provides the opportunity for instructor-guided reflection on the meaning of service. It is also the occasion when the nursing student may decide to change to a major which demands less painful introspection.

The notion of leadership is implicit in the expectation that nurses embody the Jesuit ideal of women and men for others. Courses in nursing leadership as well as in dynamics of health care provide impetus to examine a health care system which is inaccessible and unaffordable to some. These courses also provide encouragement to initiate systemic change. While the health care system is too complex to be affected by an individual nurse, nursing education provides insight into a system which is sometimes unjust and motivates collaboration with others to bring about change.

Master's and doctoral programs in nursing are sponsored by those Jesuit institutions where needs for such have been demonstrated. It is in the graduate nursing programs where the tools for teaching, specialization, and research are provided. In a 1989 address at Georgetown University to Jesuits and their and religious colleagues from all 28 United States Jesuit colleges and universities the Superior General of the Society of Jesus, Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, ascribed great impor-

tance to teaching and research, because it is through these avenues that one is able to better comprehend the nature of the human person who is, after all, the cynosure of all that is nursing.

While master's education in nursing focuses on an area of specialization, it also develops role competencies. For example, the nurse may choose to specialize in

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oncology nursing but will also choose courses and practica in teaching, management, or clinical specialization. This emphasis on both subject matter and practical use of it is another characteristic of the Jesuit educational tradition, one which Ignatius Loyola himself promoted. His directions for organizing schools were both specific and practical. If students in Jesuit schools are to be educated to help bring about a more just social order, then they must be equipped with knowledge as well as its application.

Nursing education reaches its pinnacle in doctoral programs. It is here that nursing theory is formulated, research is conducted, and new nursing knowledge is generated. It is doctoral education in nursing which provides answers to questions about the effects of caring by one human for another. It is this caring and the quest for greater knowledge of it which distinguishes nurse scientists from other scholars. It is this concern with the spirit as well as the physical which guides the inquiry as well as the practice of nurse scientists.

Julia Lane, former dean of the school of nursing at Loyola University in Chicago, wrote:

The last dimension of the care of the spirit is to allow the struggle, the pain, suffering, anger, despair, joy, fear, loneliness to be articulated — and not to flee in the face of these emotions. The nurse must stand beside the patient in a spirit of compassion and be midwife to the expressions from the patient's soul without fear.

The finest tradition of Jesuit education with its emphasis on academic excellence, service, leadership, and development of women and men for others provides an ideal context for educating nurses in this profession of caring. Dean Barkan notes in his paper on Jesuit legal education that concern for the individual is not antithetical to academic rigor. Rather, the proper timing and application of the rigor assists students to realize their fullest potential. Concern and rigor together create a synergy which energizes both student and faculty. This is the very foundation of nursing education, the purpose of which is to prepare students to be practitioners of the science of caring.

References

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