

Guest Editorial

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SUSTAINABILITY AND NURSING: EVERY NURSE'S BUSINESS

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What does sustainability mean within the health disciplines? In this editorial I focus on sustainability and the nursing profession. The nursing profession has spent many decades defining and refining the meaning of nursing; and now the abstract concept of 'sustainability' is thrown into the mix. How can these two concepts sit alongside each other in 2022? This Journal adds to this debate, and I aim to do the same.

A small but increasing amount of literature exists on the relationship between nursing and sustainability – what it is, what it could be, and how it might evolve into the future. According to Anaker and Elf (2014), the concept of sustainability in nursing is “undefined and poorly researched”, but the authors go on to state that it involves “six defining attributes: ecology, environment, future, globalism, holism and maintenance.” (p. 381)

Sustainability on its own means the ability to be maintained at a certain rate or level (Collins Dictionary online, 2022), however any contemporary definition will inevitably refer to sustainability in the context of, and concerns for, the depletion of natural resources, man-made impact on the environment, climate change and how humans can address these concerns with some urgency.

The United Nations' (UN) General Assembly, 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), unanimously adopted the calls on all countries to end poverty, redress inequality, and undertake climate change by 2030. In 2015, recognizing the multidimensional factors that affect the well-being of people and the planet, member states of the United Nations declared that the common thread linking all SDGs is health (Dossey & Beck, 2019).

Nurses may feel disconnected from the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and struggle to relate the goals to their clinical role, suggesting a need for an increase in awareness and education on the goals. The wider profession could also increase both research and policy with relation to the SDGs, strengthening nursing's position to have a voice in and contribute towards achievement of the goals. Sustainability in nursing demands more than the commonly known links of sustainability to the planet earth. And in this issue of SCOPE, Health & Wellbeing, I am relieved to acknowledge the broad range of published papers with a sustainable focus. The first paper is an interview capturing the innovative sustainable practice of Sharon Buchanan-Letts. The second paper extends the concept of sustainability, Jean Ross and Lesley Brook offer a commentary on the Blog they have created, linked to the United Nations 17 Sustainable Goals and Te Whare Tapa Wha model, developed by Māori academic Mason Durie in 1998. Te Whare Tapa Wha has long since been embraced in the nursing world for its inclusivity and wisdom in showing the absence of boundaries between the health of the individual, the community and the land – cornerstones of Māori tikanga.

Several of the SDGs could be seen to relate directly to nursing: Goal 3 is Good health and Wellbeing; Goal 5 is Gender Equality; Goal 10 is Reduced Inequalities. The way in which nurses carry out their role is pivotal to sustaining equality, tolerance, and acceptance. The following quote is from the Vision within the SDG United Nations (2015) report: *Transforming our world: The 2023 Agenda for sustainable development*:

We envisage a world of universal respect for human rights and human dignity, the rule of law, justice, equality and non-discrimination; of respect for race, ethnicity and cultural diversity; and of equal opportunity permitting the full realization of human potential and contributing to shared prosperity. A world which invests in its children and in which every child grows up free from violence and exploitation. A world in which every woman and girl enjoys full gender equality and all legal, social and economic barriers to their empowerment have been removed. A just, equitable, tolerant, open and socially inclusive world in which the needs of the most vulnerable are met. (p. 5)

Florence Nightingale recognised this wider view of health as Dossey and Beck (2019) have identified,

... the symptoms or the sufferings generally considered to be inevitable and incident to the disease are very often not symptoms of the disease at all, but of something quite different—of the want of fresh air, or of light, or of warmth, or of quiet, or of cleanliness, or of punctuality and care in the administration of diet, of each or of all of these. And this quite as much in private as in hospital nursing ...

(Nightingale, 1860 cited in Dossey & Beck, 2019, p. 45)

Finally, sustainability is not a new idea for nurses. Nurses are also citizens and live within communities – like everyone they have a collective responsibility, possibly even an ethical duty towards ensuring a sustainable environment for their patients, whanau, communities, colleagues and themselves. The SDGs align with the values embedded in professional nursing ethics (New Zealand Nurses Organisation, 2019).

Additional papers published in this volume continue with the theme sustainability. Adventure therapy practice in which Helen Jeffrey shares her research; a literature review by Dave McQuillan's mindbody methods and message therapy as a treatment for fibromyalgia; Francesca Brown's research on the health of the veterinary workforce and a sustainable project related to the health of Pacific women, by Cynthia Mullens and Jean Ross.

The following authors consider sustainability aligned with the tertiary sector; Kathryn Ross, Rachel Scrivin, Mary Cooper and Campbell Macgregor's research addresses the attitudes of COVID-19 vaccinations amongst tertiary students and staff; Suzie Bartlett and Jean Ross's literature review focuses on sustainable mental health of tertiary learners and Kerry Davis shares her commentary related to sustainability in the classroom.

The final paper is a reflective piece by Kevin Miles who considers our philosophy of spirit and our relationship with our oceanic planet as a sustainable meaningful relationship. A book review *Growing Rural Health / Tipu Haere Tuawhenua Hauora: 30 years of Advocacy and support in Aotearoa* by Josie Crawley completes this journal's publications a further reflection of the Rural General Practice Network's work over a 30-year period which also fits well within the journal theme, *Sustainability*.

So, perhaps the challenge on a pragmatic, day-to-day level is what can sustainability look like for the individual nurse who may be working in a hospital or ARC or the community, public health child health, general practice and living within a community of others?

This journal is a good starting point to add to this growing debate. Thank you for the opportunity to contribute my thoughts to a growing national and international debate. Like the chosen image on the front cover titled *Making Compost* can be considered the ultimate health activity – physical, mental, nutritional, environmental. Even spiritual.

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