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Permit No: MICA (P) 198/07/2005
 ISSN 0037 - 5675



Crawford Long (1815-1878):
 father of modern anaesthesiology
 (Refer to pages 598-599)

Nursing education: shaping the future through the richness of the past

P Kannusamy

Nursing in Singapore has come a long way since the French nuns answered the call to care for the sick on August 1, 1885. Professor Lee's article highlights the important contributions made by nurses in the early years to improve the quality of nursing care in Singapore⁽¹⁾. It was these early nurses who set the stage for future nurses; establishing nursing as a respected and valued profession.

Knowledge and the ability to accept change has been and will remain the key factors for nurses to succeed in the increasingly developing healthcare environment. As the largest work force within the healthcare system, nurses cannot rest on the achievements of the past. As Florence Nightingale once said: *"For us who Nurse, our Nursing is a thing which, unless we are making progress every year, every month, every week, we are going back. No system shall endure which does not march."*

Although these words were spoken more than a century ago, they still have meaning today. In order to stay relevant within the evolving healthcare system, many transformations have taken place in nursing and nursing education; driven by major socio-economic factors, as well as by developments in healthcare delivery and professional issues unique to nursing. With constant changes predicted in healthcare for the foreseeable future, it is imperative that nursing education programmes themselves act as agents of change. In my opinion, nursing education, in close collaboration with practice settings, will shape the present and future of nursing in Singapore.

For today's nursing students to become tomorrow's nurses, the educational preparation must be able to equip nursing graduates with the capability to take on the increasingly challenging roles required of the nursing profession. In this context, the establishment of the Alice Lee Centre for Nursing Studies in the National University of Singapore (NUS) is not only timely, but represents a major milestone in the history of nursing in Singapore. This Centre will offer the Bachelor of Science (Nursing, Honours) programme from 2006.

I foresee that this nursing degree programme will have a significant impact on the future of nursing. Designed as a broad-based programme, it will include modules in liberal arts, humanities, basic sciences and communication, which are essential for professional nurses of today who are expected to make critical decisions and manage complex patients. The vision for this undergraduate degree is to prepare critically-thinking nurses – nurses who possess a higher level of theoretical underpinnings, which will allow them to develop their clinical skills to a more sophisticated level, to work in an inter-disciplinary environment, and to respond to future challenges in healthcare for the benefit of Singaporeans.

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Any vision for the future of nursing education, however, must emanate from nursing's core values. In particular, a core value of nursing is the profession's emphasis on the whole person. Although the main roles of nurses involve assessment, planning and delivery of nursing skills, nurses today are actively involved in providing patient education, counselling and working in close collaboration with their medical counterparts.

To improve patients' outcomes, we also need to prepare expert practitioners, who can participate as full partners in healthcare delivery and shaping healthcare policies. It was with this agenda that the Ministry of Health collaborated with the NUS in 2003 to offer the Master of Nursing programme to prepare Advanced Practice Nurses. Although nurses will continue to serve a critical role in delivering care in acute care settings due to their training and education, future models will place a huge value on nurses in the management and prevention of chronic diseases; a fact that cannot be ignored when considering the future of nursing in Singapore. Undeniably, Advanced Practice Nurses will be key players in the nation's effort to provide cost-effective coordinated services that emphasise health promotion and disease prevention.

Like the nurses of the past, today's nurses will continue the commitment to further develop and elevate the nursing profession to greater heights. Though nurses will continue to face a rapidly changing healthcare landscape, shifting patient demographics, an explosion of technology, and the globalisation of healthcare, in addition to a myriad of everyday challenges, the future is bright for nursing as we build on the richness of the past. **SMD**

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Printed by Entraco Printing Pte Ltd

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