

NEWSLETTER

Feature Article

Disaster Nursing in 1950s

Tarah Brookfield, PhD Candidate, York University

During the 1950s, rising international tensions due to the Cold War prompted the Canadian government to develop a civil defence program to protect Canadians from a possible nuclear war. As in previous wars, nurses were seen by the state as critical to the successful planning and deployment of emergency measures related to health and welfare. In the aftermath of an atomic attack, nurses were expected to staff emergency hospitals, supervise volunteers, monitor public health, offer counselling to traumatized survivors and generally display medical responsibility far beyond their normal training. To prepare for this eventuality, nurses were trained to improvise life saving techniques and participated in the evacuation drills of cities, hospitals and long term care facilities. Civil defence officials also recruited nursing leaders to sit on planning committees and train a nursing auxiliary.

In 1951, Evelyn Pepper, the former Principal Matron of the No. 1 Canadian General Hospital during the Second World War and current nursing consultant for the Department of National Health and Welfare, Emergency Health Planning Group, met with nursing leaders from each province's Registered Nurses Association. She explained the potential threat facing Canada and facilitated discussion on nurses' role in national preparedness. After this consultation, Pepper concluded that nurses had two main

responsibilities. They needed to revise student nurses' curriculum to include a course in disaster nursing (something that was accomplished across the country by 1958) and ensure nurses were aware of civil defence plans for their community. Pepper stated that "that the individual nurse should prepare herself to fulfil her expected professional role in the event of disaster. This is not only a belief – it is an opportunity – an opportunity to help solve a national problem – and Canadian nurses have seized that opportunity."¹

As student nurses were introduced to disaster nursing in school, graduate nurses returned to the classroom for specialized courses organized by provincial and federal civil defence colleges. They studied projected casualty numbers and how to treat the shock, trauma, burns and radiation sickness caused by the ABC's of nuclear warfare - atomic, biological and chemical weaponry. They also learned how to organize nursing services in a hospital under emergency conditions, evacuate patients and supplies, and administer rations in refugee centres. Nurses were reminded that modern nursing practice relied on elaborate and extensive health resources, possibly unavailable in an emergency situation, however, "This need not lead to a lowering of the standard of health care but will necessitate much ingenuity, pre-planning and organization of available resources."²

1 Evelyn A. Pepper "Orientation to Disaster Nursing" *Precis* 9.01 November 1962, Emergency Public Health Services Manual – June 1963 Canadian Civil Defence College, Arnprior, Ontario 17-21 June, 2, City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 200, Series 474, File 49, Box 143147, folio 1.

2 Thelma Green "Some Newer Aspects of Civil Defence" *Civil Defence Bulletin*, January 1957 no. 61, 22, City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 200, Series 361, File 984, Box 140517-8, folio 8.

Mock drills were one way of practicing and preparing for civil defence. An example of one of these drills was “Operation Dogwood,” the 1956 evacuation of St. Paul’s Hospital in Vancouver to an improvised hospital set up at a high school in Burnaby, approximately eighteen kilometers away. On day one, volunteers from the local fire department and the Victorian Order of Nurses transported and set up all the necessary equipment including 170 beds, an X-ray department, and pharmacy in five hours. On day two eighty nurses and 180 assorted hospital staff from St. Paul’s came in on their day off to transport one hundred casualties, child and adult volunteers made up to have burns, broken bones and other ailments. The alarm sounded at 10:30 a.m. and by 1:30 p.m. all patients had been transported and checked into the improvised hospital. Nurses performed treatment while local volunteers provided a lunch cooked outdoors on makeshift stoves. At 3:00 p.m. a signal was given to stop the exercise and the drill was deemed successful by all involved. Evacuation was the preferred method of civil defence until weapon technology became too advanced to offer much advance warning of an enemy attack. Nurses became less involved in civil defence in the 1960s as family fallout shelters replaced community evacuation as the primary survival tool.

The Registered Nursing Association of Ontario News bulletin reported in 1956 that “The atomic age is a challenge to see what stuff we are made of – are we as a profession equal to this challenge? Are we interested to prepare ourselves for leadership?”³ Nurses certainly did rise to the occasion. By 1957, 13,000 nurses had received orientation and information on disaster nursing and sixty-five nurses had been trained as instructors. Although Canada never had to put its civil defence to a real test, nurses used their training

3 Registered Nursing Association of Ontario News bulletin vol. 12, September 1956 reprinted in *Civil Defence Bulletin*, January 1957 no. 61, 25, City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 200, Series 361, File 984, Box 140517-8, folio 8.

in natural disasters like 1954 Hurricane Hazel and the Red River flood of 1969. Nurses’ participation in the civil defence program, and their subsequent action in disaster areas, proved that nurses’ work and leadership capabilities have historically been necessary and crucial during times of national emergency.

Membership Renewal 2006

Have you renewed your membership for 2006? Please remember to do so. We rely on membership fees to continue the work of the Centre and further the goals.

Share this newsletter with a friend or colleague and encourage them to join. An increased membership can provide funds to engage in more projects and retrieval of nursing history artifacts. Check our website:
www.allemang.on.ca

VISIT TO THE MUSEUM OF HEALTH CARE

On May 8th, a small group from the Toronto area joined with members in Kingston for a most enjoyable and instructive visit to the Museum of Health Care. The museum is housed in the Anne Baillie building, a National Historic Site, and formerly the Kingston General (KGH) nurses’ residence. Renovations and additions to the building are ongoing. Executive Director, Dr. James Low, spoke to us of the importance of having an independently run museum devoted “exclusively to the story of health and health care.” Currently the museum remains in a field of its own. A non-profit institution, it has a National Advisory Board (members include BC nurse historian Glennis Zilm). The museum currently has 27,000 artifacts, funds a research fellowship and, most significantly according to Dr. Low, reaches out to the public through its school and community programs.

The museum staff was most welcoming. Manager Mary Dunn and curator Paul Robertson

accompanied us on our tour that included the impressive new storage area in the basement where large and small artifacts can be easily accessed. Current displays, on the ground floor, include “Potions, Pills and Plants: Remedies of the 1900s” and “Joint Ventures: Learning to Replace Human Joints.” “When Medicine Met Science” depicts major nineteenth-century changes in health care including nursing. A collection of nursing uniforms and artifacts is also on display. We learned that the museum has loaned materials to the “Caring Profession” in Ottawa and has assisted with two exhibits on the Virtual Museum of Canada, the most recent one being the “Healing Power of Plants.”

We were entertained with slides illustrating the museum’s historic walking tour. With narration by Mary, the slides virtually provided a history of Kingston. It was particularly interesting to note that the city’s original hospital, built in 1835, is still standing. It was a pleasure to meet Marilyn Boston of KGH Nursing Alumnae. As we toured the building, she had memories of her time there as a student. It was also good to see Sylvia Burkinshaw, former nursing director at KGH. The KGH Alumnae played a significant part in the creation of the museum and Marilyn is on the Board of Directors.

We are most grateful to Mary Dunn for arranging the visit and to Lynn Kirkwood for her help with details. The museum website can be visited at www.museumofhealthcare.ca. Information on membership can be obtained from the site.

Article

Ontario’s Red Cross Nurse Craze: 1899-1902

Sarah Glassford, York University

In 1899 the Canadian Red Cross Society offered to send two nursing sisters overseas along with the Canadian troops going to fight in South Africa. The Government declined the offer, but a small Red Cross nurse craze swept Ontario anyway.

Patriotic concerts were one of the main types of fundraising done for Red Cross during this period, and they often included a recitation of Kipling’s poem “The Absent-Minded Beggar,” during or after which young ladies dressed as Red Cross nurses would take up a collection. The poem urged listeners to help support the families of soldiers in South Africa (a cause which had nothing to do with Red Cross), and the response was always generous.

These Red Cross nurses also served tea and handed out programmes, sometimes even at events which had no relation to Red Cross at all. A very large part of the appeal was the costume: dressing-up in dainty white or pale blue dresses with red crosses on their left arms and caps coquettishly perched on their heads held an irresistible charm for the young ladies of Ontario. Nor was the appeal limited to Ontario: Edmonton’s Red Cross charity ball featured a supper served by members of the branch dressed as Red Cross nurses.

The fact that Canada had never yet had any female Red Cross nurses was entirely lost on Canadians during the South African War, and the image of a Red Cross nurse would continue to be an iconic one for the Canadian Red Cross Society until well into the second half of the 20th century.

News items

New History of Nursing Course

Dr. Geertje Boschma, faculty member at the UBC School of Nursing has six students

enrolled in an elective course titled Historical Inquiry of Nursing and Health Care. The course is described briefly, as follows: "This course offers an opportunity to understand changes in nursing practice and health care in their historical context. Topics in the history of nursing and health care will be examined based on critical analysis of historical readings. Major social and cultural influences, such as religion, gender, class, ethnicity, education as well as the impact of institutional health care and science on the evolution of nursing practice will be explored".

(Excerpted from History of Nursing News, BC History of Nursing Professional Practice Group. 17(1).)

Nursing Exhibit-The Canadian Museum of Civilization closing early

The closing date of "A Caring Profession: Centuries of Nursing in Canada" has been moved ahead by five weeks to July 30, 2006. The run has been shortened to accommodate major structural changes to the gallery space.

The exhibit opened June 16, 2005 and to date close to 110,000 people have visited. If you haven't been it is truly worth a visit before the closure.

Obituaries

Jean Dodds

Jean Dodds died at Toronto on March 10, 2006 after a long and distinguished career in nursing. Jean graduated from the School of

Nursing, Toronto General Hospital in September 1946 and began her twenty-five year career in Nursing.

Jean was of Scottish descent, the only child of Scoon and Elma Dodds. She grew up in Toronto attending St. Clement's School, where her leadership abilities were first noted as she was appointed a Prefect. She entered nursing in 1946 and lived in residence, sharing with others the trials and tribulations of student days. She was generous with her support, kindness, and understanding, qualities that remained forever with her.

Jean worked as an operating room nurse, supervisor and assistant director of nursing at TGH. She spent a year in Nursing Education and Administration at the University of Western Ontario. In 1960 she succeeded Mary MacFarland as Director of Nursing, until 1969. Her department responsibilities included both nursing administration and nursing education. Students graduating between 1963-1969 remembered her with affection.

The hospital was always a focus of pride for Jean and she was an active participant throughout her tenure. She served as secretary of the Archives and Historical Committee of the hospital. She was a life member and past Chair of the Alumnae Association. At the time of her death she was Chair of the Service and Trust Committee.

Jean loved to travel and was a frequent visitor to Scotland and motoring to the east coast to visit friends. She was devoted to the church-Glenview Presbyterian-serving as a Sunday School Teacher, an Elder, and on many committees, and worked for Meals on Wheels. She was a lifelong member and was the oldest member of the Glenview. Jean is remembered by all who knew her with high regard for her professional skill and gracious manner, manifested in her politeness, protocol and warm authority.

E. Jean Hill

E. Jean Hill, Dean Emeritus, Queen's University School of Nursing—died February 22, 2006 at St. Lawrence Place, Kingston, ON. Dr. Hill was Dean of Nursing from 1968 to 1977. A Canadian citizen, she received her higher education in the United States (University of Kansas, Yale, Western Reserve, Columbia). She was a leader in the development of university nursing education in both countries. She taught nursing at Columbia and Boston Universities, and prior to coming to Queen's, was Director of Nursing Education, University of Kansas for 14 years. She believed strongly in the integration of scientific knowledge and human caring as the basis of nursing education. She was admired and respected by her colleagues at Queen's. She served on numerous university committees and at the national nursing level. Following retirement she was a member of University Council and maintained her service to St. George's Cathedral until her recent illness. She will be sadly missed by several nieces and nephews and by many friends in Canada and in the United States. (Excerpted from *The Globe and Mail*, February 24, 2006).

Jean Marilyn Lowry

Jean Lowry was born in the Caledon region of Ontario on September 23, 1931 and died in Toronto on April 3, 2006. She was the eldest of six children born to farmers in the Caledon region. Jean was a graduate of the Ontario Hospital in Whitby in 1951, completing her studies despite a broken hip suffered in a car accident. Six years later she received certification in Public Health Nursing from the University of Toronto.

She worked at the Etobicoke Health Department, and during this time joined a committee to hear complaints about poor working conditions and low wages in the health care sector, sparking her interest in labour relations issues for nurses.

On October 13, 1973, in a landmark meeting in Toronto, more than 300 representatives of 85 independent nursing organizations from across the province joined forces to form the Ontario Nurses' Association with Mrs. Lowry installed as founding President. Just nine months later, after a brief but noisy dispute the ONA reached an 18-month agreement with Queen's Park covering 10,000 registered nurses in 41 hospitals, boosting starting salaries to \$10,200 annually and maximum salaries by a healthy 50%. Eventually the union would bring together 104 separate nurses' associations.

Jean served two, one-year terms as President of the ONA. She worked for 16 years in several staff positions at ONA, retiring in 1991 as an honorary member. Today the ONA represents more than 51,000 registered nurses and allied health professionals.

Over the past 30 years, the ONA has spearheaded great strides for nurses in pay, layoff provisions, overtime, parental leave and recognition of previous experience, to name a few areas. Mrs. Lowry noted with satisfaction the changes brought about over the years, not only in the strength and power of the nursing collective, but how nurses regard themselves. George Smitherman, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, acknowledged Mrs. Lowry's accomplishments in the Ontario legislature. "...Thousands of nurses have benefited from the efforts made and the example set by Jean Lowry. As a result of that hundreds and thousands of patients have as well." Lamentably, it was a long-time smoking habit that resulted in lung cancer that finally claimed her. (Excerpted from *The Globe and Mail*, Thursday, April 27, 2006).

Dates to Remember

**CANADIAN ASSOCIATION FOR
THE HISTORY OF NURSING/
L'ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE**

POUR L'HISTOIRE DU NURSING

History of Nursing Conference 19th annual meeting Vancouver, BC, June 8-10, 2006.

Hosted by the BC History of Nursing Professional Practice Group, the conference will be held at the historic St. Paul's Hospital, 1081 Burrard street, Vancouver, BC.

The conference theme is **Frontline Nurse Historical Milestones**. A highlight of the conference will be an evening dinner and opera excerpts from "Florence: The Lady with the Lamp".

[http:// www.cahn-achn.ca](http://www.cahn-achn.ca)

History of Nursing Writing Prize

The Allemang Centre is offering a prize of \$500 for the best essay in the history of nursing written by a student in the year September 2005 through August 2006.

Criteria for submissions:

1. The paper may deal with any topic in the history of nursing in any period and in any country.
2. Papers should be a minimum of 8 pages, and a maximum of 25 pages in length including footnotes.
3. Both undergraduate and graduate students may submit.
4. The student must be enrolled in a university or community college in Ontario. Students **from any faculty, including nursing, social science, humanities and science**, are invited to apply.

The deadline for submission is August 31 2006. The prize will be awarded in October 2006.

Papers may be submitted either by e-mail or in hard copy. Electronic copies should be in Microsoft Word include academic affiliation, address, telephone and fax numbers. Students submitting in hard copy should send three copies. The first copy should have the name, academic affiliation, address, telephone, fax

and e-mail. The remaining two copies should have no identification.

Please send papers to the vice-president of Allemang Centre:

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Editor Newsletter

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