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The Necessity of Social Justice Nursing

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EDITORIAL

Just over a decade ago, the WHO's (2008) commission on the social determinants of health concluded that social injustice was killing people on a grand scale. With increasing health inequities (i.e. disparities in health and quality of life rooted in marginalization and/or social disadvantage), the onus for nursing to affect social change through practice, leadership, policy, research and education is crucial. The Canadian Nurses Association recently reaffirmed the centrality of social justice as a focus for nursing viewing it as “means to an end and an end in itself,” acknowledging its consistency with the values set out in our code of ethics (CNA, 2010; CNA, 2017). Critical community health nurse, Dr. Benita Cohen (2010) invites nurses in any setting to take four key advocacy steps in order to enact a social justice nursing practice, including: equipping ourselves with the facts, challenging societal beliefs about individual responsibility for health, promoting equity considerations in health policy and program planning within our own organization, and working to bring about social change. The birth of this journal – this movement in Canada is wholly aligned with a belief that nursing work is social justice work.

To focus on *Social Justice Nursing* as a theme for our second issue signals the centrality - the necessity - of nursing that disrupts the status quo in order to ensure health equity for all. To seek out and name injustices and inequities *is* nursing. To be a vocal advocate for fairness, non-maleficence and dignity *is* nursing. To call into question harmful policies, practices or assumptions that impede the health and quality of life of the planet and its' inhabitants *is* nursing. Our legacy in equity-based concerns is rich, but our work is not done. Social Justice Nursing ensures that Canada's nurses avoid complicity, keeping central to our work the inherent rights of the individuals, families, communities and populations we are privileged to care for and partner with. Nurses witness much, and thus we are afforded daily opportunities to contribute to just health-care systems, just policies and just societal practices.

For if not us, then who?

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