

## Foreword

*Nursing Knowledge* is a unique and compelling contribution to the body of philosophical work in nursing. Mark Risjord offers a fresh perspective of the evolution of nursing theory, science, and practice as seen through the lens of a philosopher. Risjord comprehensively analyzes the history of the development of the professional discipline of nursing. He includes all the major threads of philosophical thought, identifying their origins, critical differences, and potential for primacy. By revealing the historical juxtaposition of competing philosophies of nursing, he retraces nursing's tortuous path and conveys the passion of its scholars for the discipline and the practice. But this book is not a dry text; it reads as an exciting documentary that relates the development of nursing philosophy in the context of an evolving professional practice of nursing and an evolving general philosophy of science. Risjord goes beyond analysis of the writings to consider the philosophical debates in nursing in the context of societal changes in the status of women and nurses in health care along with the continuous transformation of philosophy of science into successive postpositivist forms. Each philosophical thread in nursing is addressed, treated as valid, and appropriately placed in the evolution of contemporary philosophy of nursing. But there are some surprising revelations from Risjord's philosophical analysis.

A major advance in this book comes from Risjord's presentation of disparate views as valuable to the evolution of nursing knowledge and science rather than as distractions. Risjord documents that while philosophers of nursing strived for consensus and adoption of a single model to unify the discipline; opposing views were key to clarifying the purpose of the discipline and developing its knowledge. A notable and valuable contribution to nursing philosophy is Risjord's analysis of the pervasive impact of logical positivism over time, despite nursing's rejection of this philosophy of science. One becomes aware of Risjord's prowess as a philosopher in his analysis of the subtle and, apparently, unrecognized influence of positivism, even in recent presentations and publications of philosophers in nursing. I had not recognized this evidence and thus was surprised by his findings. It is extremely important for nursing to

fully understand the philosophical underpinnings of its models for knowledge and theory generation and this book teaches by example how this is done. Risjord offers an alternate, nonpositivist, conceptual model for generating value-laden theory to assist nursing in its quest for scientific discovery that is relevant to nursing practice and to the understanding of human health in general.

Risjord captures the prevailing sense of urgency on the part of nurse scholars to articulate a unique and defining conceptual model or grand theory of nursing. Identification of a unique discipline and science of nursing was and still continues to be needed to respond to external threats to the legitimacy of nursing as a profession and as a field of PhD study. Internally, nursing scholars fiercely and legitimately debated the directionality of influence of practice and knowledge. For the beginning scholar or student in nursing, this book is an essential companion to the reading of original classic and contemporary philosophical papers in nursing because it clarifies the unique contribution and historical context of each. This book is a definitive guide to the universe of nursing knowledge and philosophy. For the seasoned scholar, *Nursing Knowledge* reads as a compelling documentary that recasts long-standing debates on the nature and generation of nursing knowledge in a new mode and revisits the relationship of theory to practice. *Nursing Knowledge* takes the reader on an historical trip that celebrates disparate views on philosophical issues as a natural part of the evolution of the discipline and its relationship to the practice of nursing. What is unexpected is the progressive philosophy of nursing that awaits the reader at journey's end. Risjord does not disappoint; he transports the reader into a new frame of reference, a new philosophy, for advancing nursing knowledge in a manner that promises to make it more relevant to practice and theoretically coherent.

In his analysis of philosophy of nursing science, Risjord focuses on nursing's continuing utilization of hierarchical disciplinary structures, such as metaparadigm/paradigm and grand/middle-range/situation theory. This analysis alone makes the book required reading. He points out that while these structures serve the purpose of identifying a unique domain of nursing knowledge, they are at odds with nursing's professed preference for postpositivist philosophical views of value-laden science, including nursing's intent to bridge the theory--practice gap. Risjord argues that hierarchical structures isolate nursing knowledge from that of other disciplines, thus limiting the impact of nursing in advancing an enlightened view of human

health across disciplines. His analysis of the separation of qualitative and quantitative research into distinct paradigms within the discipline is particularly astute; it reveals that, while intellectually convenient, this separation limits the overall support for critical theories in nursing. Perhaps the most shocking of his revelations is that hierarchical disciplinary structures in nursing emanate from the positivist viewpoint.

As an alternate, Risjord offers a radically different, nonpositivist philosophical view of knowledge structure that was first introduced by Quine ([1953] 1961). In this frame of reference, human knowledge is viewed as an integrated whole of theories from many disciplines; individual disciplines influence the whole of knowledge to the extent that their theories are coherent with those of other disciplines. Disciplines are expected to work within a unique perspective and to offer theories that reflect this perspective, but the ultimate goal is to find external support for the theories of the discipline of origin. Risjord presents this model of theory coherence in a distinctive and memorable way using the metaphors of a quilt and a spider web. Theories are depicted as nodes of a spider web that gain structural support and utility based on coherent linkages to other theories, irrespective of discipline of origin. Risjord makes a strong case for seeking coherence of theories originating in nursing across many disciplines. In the coherence model, nursing is free to link its theories to those in other fields to gain support for them and to offer theoretical support for theories beyond nursing. The theory coherence model offers nursing a more expansive means of generating knowledge to advance the values and practice of the profession. Within a coherence framework, nursing has the potential to develop knowledge for the world as well as the practice of nursing. As a relatively young discipline, nursing is justified in considering the possibility of losing its disciplinary identity through interdisciplinary research. In Risjord's conceptualization of theory coherence, nursing practice unifies the discipline, allowing nursing to share theory and knowledge. Supportive linkages to other disciplines can be created without losing nursing's distinctive disciplinary perspective. In turn, nursing can use theory from other sources not for the purpose of "borrowing" but rather for establishing coherence and support for nursing theories.

Risjord makes a compelling case for restructuring nursing knowledge into a model that is theoretically coherent and practically relevant. Most importantly, he offers a new philosophy of nursing to guide its knowledge development. *Nursing Knowledge* is essential reading, not just to trace the evolution of nursing science and knowledge, but to frame the philosophical issues for

the next round of scholarly debates and to position nursing for a transdisciplinary role in knowledge development.

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