


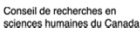

Generational Activism in Nursing

Findings from Life Histories with Ontario Nurses and Implications for Nursing Education

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Qualitative Study of Nurses' Activism

- + What are the influences and impacts of diversely situated nurses' activism, and what strategies are relevant to their activist practice?
- + **Activism:** "a combination of individual and social action designed to gain political commitment, policy support, social acceptance and system support for a particular health goal or programme" (WHO, 1998, p. 5).

Ethics approval: Office of Research Ethics at York University

Methodology: Comparative life history (MacDonnell, 2011), critical feminist lens

Methods: Purposeful convenience sampling, semi-structured interviews and focus groups

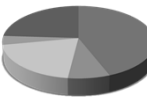
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Participant Demographics

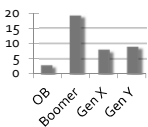
39 participants:

- + 33 registered nurses (9 were also students)
- + 6 nursing students

Areas of Nursing Practice



Participants




Generation	Number of Participants
OB	2
Boomer	18
Gen X	8
Gen Y	11

How Activism is Understood

Standing up for an issue, advancing a cause, creating change

- + "Nurses may not really see it or be able to pinpoint it but...we're always demonstrating activism."
- + "Part of our job description" (PHN and Street Health)
- + "Essential to our moral survival...as people and as a profession"

Collaborative action and collective voice of nurses "powerful"



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www.jamoa.ca/node/858
www.youtube.com/watch?v=HcCjCjYffeature=player_embedded

Blurred Lines...

- + Nursing activism vs. "on the side"
 - + Nursing knowledge informs community activism
- + Activism vs. Advocacy
 - + Individual and System levels
- + Identity as an Activist
 - + "I don't think I would have ever used the term..."
 - + "I think of myself as a nurse first and foremost and I think of political action and activism as a part of that role."
 - + Activism is just "in your bones"
- + What is appropriate as a nurse?
 - + Page scenario

Nurses' Activist Practices

Examples from within nursing profession:


- + Advocating for marginalized
- + Union activities
- + Challenging system re: staffing, health & safety, budget cuts

Other examples:

- + Advocating for children with special needs within school system
- + Promoting political engagement
- + Lobbying for community needs
- + Standing up for women's rights, health care funding
- + Letter writing to MPPs, city council

Critical Influences and Incidents

- Mentors**
 - + Speaker at RNAO convention "ignited something in me"
- Family**
 - + Encouraged to "have a voice"
- Education**
 - + Variable, increasing focus on activism within graduate studies
- Events or challenges to overcome**
 - + Personal and professional
- Values of human rights and equity**
 - + "Injustice breeds activists"



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Challenges, Risks, and Barriers

- Personal Challenges**
 - + Balancing personal and professional obligations
 - + Burnout or emotional exhaustion
 - + Fear of consequences
- Limited Engagement of Colleagues**
 - + "I think they're seeing very little political action in the world of nursing in my faculty." (Boomer)
 - + "I'm afraid for the future of not only my union but even the nursing profession as a whole if nurses don't become involved" (Gen X)
 - + "It's a lot of work to get peers motivated..." (Gen Y)
- Gendered Expectations About Role of Nurse**
 - + Some perceive stereotype remains of nurses as "passive" and "traditionally conservative profession"

"I'm sure those nurses on the medical floor have a lot to say...they know a lot of people being discharged too early, and see people coming back in...but I don't think they're allowed to speak" (#27B)

"(unions) are going to advance causes that they don't want to hear about" (#3B)

"What PHNs are doing now is a mere shadow of what they used to do." (#28B)

Organizational Challenges

Yet some nurses perceived no organizational barriers to their activist work...

"I think nurses are far more encouraged to be the drones and get the work done than they are to take action on things." (#28B)

"We're constantly in turmoil because we're having difficulty delivering patient care and meeting the needs of our employer which is to stay within budget." (#16X)

"It's always been done that way." (#14B)

Role of Education in Fostering Capacity

- + A critical stance and political action congruent with social justice goals, addressing structural roots of inequities and the SDOH, were more common among younger participants and those with higher educational attainment

Given nurses' mandate to engage in political action, are we preparing the next generation of nurse activists? What counts as meaningful education?

Challenges:

- + Some Gen Y/students acknowledge need for political action but lack confidence and tools
- + Variable support for political action among faculty ("It's become more difficult to teach political action" – Boomer)
- + Opportunities for experiential learning? Modeling? Nurses and faculty with experience in political action?
- + Adoption of NCLEX and concern for community health content

Recommendations for Education

- + "Political action can't be a dirty word and we have to use it."
- + "I actually think it's a mistake to tie it to one clinical setting. You don't want to graduate a bunch of med/surg nurses who think that all the guys in community health are the only people that have to do this."
- + "It would be most helpful to have a serious discussion about politics in the health care system. In a sense have a political science course which is focused on health care or political studies..."
- + **Examples:**
 - + Support from school to attend political rally
 - + Field trip to board of health meeting
 - + Political action project
 - + Faculty as mentors: "(Our professor) seems very into politics and every class she'll bring up the CBC website and look at different stories and you can tell like she's not just teaching it. She really, really loves it. And even though she might not be in parliament or I don't know if she goes to protests or what she does, she just has that way about her."

Areas for Further Analysis

- + Impact of Generation
- + Social Media Use for Activism
- + Influence of Gender

"...there's a real danger that we could become much less relevant...if we are not better at staking out what is our area of practice and expertise...and activism has to be one of those. Who else to better articulate those links between broad policies and human health?"

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