ACN HISTORY CONFERENCE

Disrupting discourses: new views on nursing history

29 June 2015
Australian Catholic University, North Sydney
## Conference program

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<td>MC introduction and welcome</td>
<td>Dr Madonna Grehan MACN, University of Melbourne</td>
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<td>9:10am</td>
<td>ACN Welcome</td>
<td>Ms Carmen Morgan FACN, ACN President</td>
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<td>An oral historian’s conundrum: how do we deal with the diversity of psychiatric/mental health nurses’ stories of custodial institutional care?</td>
<td>Dr Kate Prebble, University of Auckland</td>
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<td>Edith Cavell: WWI material culture and memory</td>
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<td>Policy, de-institutionalisation and nursing in NSW, 1945–2015: lessons for today?</td>
<td>Dr John Sinclair, Australian Catholic University</td>
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<td>‘Blood and guts: that’s what I’m here for’ – nurses who thrilled to World War I</td>
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<td>1:30pm</td>
<td>Mindful of the mayhem: maternity and midwives at the female factory Parramatta</td>
<td>Ms Lesley Potter MACN, University of Sydney</td>
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<td>Nurses in the Ruehen baby farm case, 1944–1946</td>
<td>Professor Linda Shields FACN, James Cook University</td>
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<td>‘Ordinary’ working women - not so ordinary lives</td>
<td>Ms Jennifer Rabach FACN, Victoria University</td>
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<td>Professional gossip: blurring professional and personal spheres in nursing journals, 1910–1930</td>
<td>Associate Professor Pamela Wood MACN, Federation University Australia</td>
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<td>4:00pm</td>
<td>Close</td>
<td>Dr Madonna Grehan MACN, University of Melbourne</td>
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An oral historian’s conundrum: How do we deal with the diversity of psychiatric/mental health nurses’ stories of custodial institutional care?

**Purpose and significance:** This methodological paper explores the challenge faced by oral historians when dealing with the diverse views of care expressed by psychiatric/mental health nurses who practiced within custodial institutional environments. Elucidation of this issue will assist historians to contribute to the historiography of psychiatric/mental health nursing while acknowledging the trauma experienced by many psychiatric service users in custodial settings.

**Methodology and sources:** Drawing on my experience of collecting and using oral histories of New Zealand nurses over a 15 year period, I raise practical and ethical issues related to psychiatric/mental health nurses’ diverse opinions and memories. In particular, I ask, what is our role in supporting these nurses to tell their stories? How should we record and archive their accounts? How do we decide whose story to tell, and how to tell them? The presentation will use quotations from interviews to illustrate the diverse ways in which psychiatric/mental health nurses look back on their past. The discussion draws on secondary sources to support its arguments about ethical writing in nursing history.

**Findings:** Oral histories collected from psychiatric/mental health nurses who worked in the institutional environment during the 1950s to 1970s, reflect a variety of viewpoints from glorifying the ‘good old days’ to regretting powerlessness to intervene with abusive practices. Recording and archiving interviews required close attention to ethical processes. Writing for publication required care to ensure that the nurses’ personal accounts of their careers were honoured without minimising the trauma experienced by many service users in institutional environments.

**Conclusion:** Psychiatric/mental health nurses express diverse views on their experience of working in custodial institutional environments. Oral historians should take care in how they record, archive and use the stories.

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Edith Cavell: WWI material culture and memory

The name Edith Cavell may not be familiar to younger generations of nurses. Yet for past generations, Edith Cavell was as famous as Florence Nightingale. A British-born nurse working in Brussels during World War I, Cavell was executed by the German army in 1915, reportedly, for aiding a resistance movement. The news of her death by firing squad reverberated around the allied world.

The story of Cavell’s murder and recognition of nurses’ contribution to the war effort resonated. Within a short space of time, Cavell was an icon. Her status as a martyr and heroine of WWI was perpetuated by communities through material legacies: memorial nurses’ homes, statues, postcards, stamps, books, and films. In this presentation I will discuss the place of Edith Cavell in the cultural memory of nursing and the broader community. Drawing on a range of items from my personal collection of Cavell ephemera, I will discuss the material culture that this individual’s story generated.
Mr John Sinclair MACN

John Sinclair has been a lecturer at ACU since 2003. He is a hospital trained nurse, RPN and RGN. He managed his own technology company, building an “elearning” solution for Optus in 1996. He has worked at Macquarie University and University of Sydney. He is an Official Visitor to Gazetted Mental Health Units in NSW. He is President of the Australian and New Zealand Society for the History of Medicine, NSW Branch, a member of the Australian College of Nursing and the Australian College of Mental Health Nurses. In 1988 he was a Ministerial appointee to the Implementation Committee on Mental Health and Developmental Disability (the Barclay Committee) and maintains an interest in mental health policy.

Policy, de-institutionalisation and nursing in NSW, 1945-2015: lessons for today?

Dr Kirsty Harris

Dr Kirsty Harris is an Honorary Fellow in the School of Historical and Philosophical Studies at the University of Melbourne. She was awarded the 2008 C.E.W. Bean Prize for Military History for her PhD on the work of Australian women in World War I, published as More than Bombs and Bandages (BigSky, 2011). She has published academic articles on military nursing work including nurse dispensers, British-Australian nursing relationships during World War I, nursing at sea and post-war work. Her research interests include the experiences of Empire women at Gallipoli in 1915.

‘Blood and guts: that’s what I’m here for’ - nurses who thrilled to World War I

Aim: To examine the inner beliefs and attitudes towards war of Australian trained nurses who nursed next to the front line on the coast of the Gallipoli peninsula, Turkey during the First World War.

Research: Nurses on the ferry service at the Gallipoli coast were able to directly observe the battles and came under gunfire and bombs. Existing histories and media coverage have consistently pointed out nurses’ negative views towards war; in the main these views are from nurses who only saw the results of battle rather than fighting itself. As a result, those nurses who found war thrilling and exciting are not represented in secondary sources. Using nurses in the Gallipoli campaign in 1915 as a case-study, the research presented in this paper both enhances and disrupts our comprehension of nurses as members of the military machine and women’s behaviour while working under gunfire. It was a ‘small’ moment before patients arrived and the hell of the wards turned the nurses’ focus to their internal environment.

Historical method was used to examine and interpret primary and secondary sources such as nurses’ diaries and letters, enabling this study to quantify and critically analyse the number of those with these attitudes. Detailed archive searches have been undertaken in order to obtain material relating to the nurses studied.

Summary and conclusion: The view that military nurses should dislike war, ‘be a good nurse’ and have a proscribed female gendered reaction to war is overturned by those excited by war, who felt lucky to be a witness to warfare, who wanted more, and ‘to be in the thick of it’.
Comparing Russian - Soviet Nursing in the Eastern Front during the First and Second World Wars

In May 1942, Soviet nurses produced their professional journal “Meditsinskaia Sestra” [Medical Sister] for the first time. The Second World War had already swept Europe, and was threatening to devour the Soviet territory. This context dictated the nature of the journal, highly didactical, but also a tribute to the female nurses who had rescued more than 50 wounded soldiers under enemy fire. The articles in this journal are important historical sources about the conditions of nursing in the Soviet Union, and in pre-Soviet Russia. This paper compares the nature and experiences of Russian and Soviet nurses in the First and Second World War, drawing on personal recollections published in this journal between 1942 -1945, and additional personal diaries. It examines and compares the nurses; social origins, medical training, their motivations to serve in the wars, and the roles fulfilled by them within the conflicts.

Through this comparative historical analysis (Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003), we can better understand how the Russian / Soviet nurses cadres responded to these dramatic events, and how the different historical contexts of WWI Russia and WWII Soviet Union impacted on the nature and character of the nursing profession and its role.

Nearly twenty thousand Russian nurses rendered their services to their country in WWII, but there is limited research about them. Half a million nurses and orderlies served in the Red Army during WWII. Their experience is better known, but is typically treated without reference to WWII. This paper will compare their experiences in historical context, to generate new insights into the Russian and Soviet nursing profession and its role in these conflicts.

Findings or conclusions: In this paper will be argued that a distinctive shift in the social origins, the level of government involvement in the recruitment of nurses and distinctive political motivations during both Wars, brought the image of the military female nurse from obscurity into public domain in WWII.

Mindful of the Mayhem: Maternity and Midwives at the Female Factory Parramatta

This paper will examine the employment of midwives at the Female Factory, Parramatta between 1822 and 1839 by the colonial government. The employment of these midwives was necessitated by the disruptive presence of a large number of pregnant women who wanted to birth at the Factory. These women mainly convicts subverted the intended official purpose of the Female Factory so that it became known as the first lying-in facility in the State of New South Wales. The government had intended the Factory to be a place of retribution and punishment of recalcitrant convict women and a place of refuge and accommodation for convict women arriving in Sydney. Due to the presence of these refractory women the female factory was notorious as a place of mayhem and disorder.

The methodological approach used for this paper has been the researching and writing of history ‘from below’. This means avoiding the metanarrative of the Female Factory as told through colonial officials or the factory committee. It means recounting the history of these midwives by examining the traces, clues and fragments of information that has been discovered about them. This information has largely been sourced through the online digitalised newspaper (Trove) of the National Library and by searching the Colonial Secretary’s Correspondence located at the State Archive of New South Wales.

The presence and employment of midwives at the factory is significant as it presents another aspect of the history of both the factory and colonial midwives that has not been obvious in the historical records. The purpose of this research then is to identify these midwives and relate something of their story and contribution to the history of colonial midwifery in the nineteenth century.
The Nazi era remains a sentinel event in world history. Many more mothers were forced to pay for this “care” and the resultant crimes occurred in the Ruehen Volkswagen Works near Wolfsburg, Germany, and have become known as the “Ruehen baby farm case” from June 1944 to April 1945. The trials took place at Helmstedt, Germany in May-June 1946. The crimes occurred in the Ruehen Volkswagen Works near Wolfsburg, Germany, and have become known as the “Ruehen Baby Farm Case”. The victims were Polish and Russian women slave labourers, and their infants. The court tried three nurses, three doctors and four administrators.

Abortion remained illegal for German women, but foreign forced labourers were often forced to terminate pregnancies. If they did not, the babies were “farmed” in institutions where care was at best minimal and, at worst, nonexistent or fatal. In some, infant mortality was 100%, malnutrition and untreated infections were rampant. The mothers were forced to pay for this “care” and the resultant outcomes of the victims, and trial results.

We analysed trial transcripts of crimes against humanity which occurred from June 1944 to April 1945. The trials took place at Helmstedt, Germany in May-June 1946.

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Associate Professor Pamela Wood MACN

Associate Professor Pamela Wood is a registered nurse with a PhD in History from the University of Otago. Her current research focuses on what has shaped our health beliefs and practices, and nursing in the marginal settings of rural bush, urban slums and war. She developed and ran the only postgraduate nursing history course in New Zealand for over 10 years, with around 20 students continuing with nursing history research for their postgraduate thesis. She currently works as Associate Dean Research in the Faculty of Health at Federation University Australia.

Professional gossip: blurring professional and personal spheres in nursing journals, 1910-1930

When nursing journals were established in New Zealand and Australia at the beginning of the twentieth century, they were seen in part as a means of establishing or sustaining connections between nurses once they moved beyond their training hospitals and of informing nurses of shifts and changes in the nursing workforce. Special columns revealed nurses’ personal lives, relating engagements, marriages, births, deaths and new nursing positions. These columns constituted professional gossip. For the historian today, they are a rich source of information about nurses that might not otherwise be available. Digitised journals, such as Kai Tiaki: The Journal of the Nurses of New Zealand, facilitate access to this source of information and make it possible to build a richer understanding of individual nurses in the past. Material in the gossip columns also allows us to disrupt understandings of the boundaries between professional and personal spheres and the role of journal editors in the professionalisation of nursing.

This paper examines the gossip columns in one journal, Kai Tiaki, 1910-1930. It presents an analysis of the information contained in them and demonstrates how the material can contribute to a prosopographical study of nurses in this period. The paper illustrates the potential of this source by tracing individual nurses through their careers and life events. The paper also considers the role of the journal editor, Hester Maclean, who was also the country’s chief nurse and the Matron-in-Chief of the New Zealand Army Nursing Service during World War I. It considers the extent to which her cheerful willingness to blur the boundaries between her various roles in publishing personal information about nurses contributed to nursing’s professional status.