# **Position**Statement



# PROMOTING NURSING HISTORY

## **CNA POSITION**

CNA believes learning from nursing history is critical to advancing the profession in the interests of the Canadian public.

CNA believes the responsibility for the collection, preservation and study of nursing history is shared among individual nurses, nursing organizations and health care agencies, nurse educators, nursing alumni associations, historians, governments, museums and archives. All share the responsibility to preserve the history of the nursing profession and further develop current collections through the provision of historical materials to relevant museums and archives, by using nursing history as an ongoing resource and actively supporting nursing historical research.

#### RESPONSIBILITIES

Responsibilities include, but are not limited to, the following.

- *Individual nurses* have the responsibility to preserve nursing history by sharing historical documents and experiences (i.e., articles, oral histories and biographies).
- *Individual nursing organizations and health care agencies* are responsible to collect and preserve documents related to nursing.
- *Nurse educators* are responsible to integrate historical concepts and relevant historical content into curricula as well as document changes in nursing education. They are responsible to impart a sense of the history's value to the students. They are responsible for supporting scholarly research and publication in the area of nursing history.
- *Nursing alumni associations* are responsible to contribute to the preservation of their documents by transferring items to archives and museums.
- *Historians* are responsible to engage in the conduct of scholarly research through peer-reviewed and ethically-approved studies that adhere to established professional historical practices, to validate, refine and challenge existing knowledge, as well as to generate new knowledge.<sup>1</sup>
- *Governments* are responsible to preserve the history of nursing in Canada. They do so by supporting museums, archives and publications, as well as by supporting nurse researchers.
- *Museums and archives* are responsible to preserve and provide access to nursing history for study, research, clinical and educational purposes.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> (Registered Nurses Association of British Columbia, 2003).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> (Alberta Association of Registered Nurses, 2003).



### **BACKGROUND**

Nurses<sup>3</sup> must be knowledgeable about the social, political and economic forces that have shaped their discipline. History has the potential to contribute to the development of professional identity as well as to increase the visibility of the profession within Canadian society. Knowledge of nursing's history is an important source of self-understanding, group cohesiveness, empowerment and pride.

Nurses research and develop professional practice based on prior experiences and internal historical reflection. It is essential for nurse clinicians, educators, administrators, researchers and policy-makers to understand the challenges and opportunities of the past in order to prepare direction for the future. Therefore, a historical perspective is important to the quality of care in all the domains of nursing.<sup>4</sup> "Uncovering past trends is a vital part of all nursing research."<sup>5</sup>

Nurses in Canada have made an enormous contribution to all aspects of Canadian society. Their involvements have influenced the wider social, economic and political history of Canada, as well as the history and politics of health care. Nursing history provides the public with valuable perspectives on emerging technologies, health care reform and gender issues in Canadian society. It is important, therefore, to promote nursing history within mainstream Canadian history.<sup>6</sup>

Nursing history encompasses collecting, preserving, researching, studying and analyzing nurses' contributions to the profession and health care in Canada. It is important to incorporate nursing history into the curricula of nursing schools and faculties. The study of history can challenge conventional wisdom and offer insight from the past to the present. It can offer not only contextual perspectives, but it can also provide students with a sense of professional heritage and identity, introduce them to the interdisciplinary world of humanities and broaden their repertoire of research skills.<sup>7</sup>

The Canadian Nursing History Collection<sup>8</sup> is a key nursing resource featuring documents, photographs and artifacts from the Canadian Nurses Association (CNA), the Nursing Sisters Association of Canada and individual collections, documenting the story of nursing in Canada. The collection is located within the Canadian Museum of Civilization, the Canadian War Museum and the National Archives of Canada. Individual nurses, nursing specialty groups, nursing associations and others interested in nursing can contribute to nursing archives and museums across Canada that contain historical materials. These collections are living entities with the capacity to grow.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this document, the term "nurse" refers to a registered nurse.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Domains of nursing include clinical practice (direct care), education, research and administration.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> (Nurses Association of New Brunswick, 2003).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> (McPherson, 1996; Davies, 1980).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> (American Association for the History of Nursing, 2001).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> The signatory partners are the Canadian Museum of Civilization, the Canadian War Museum, the National Archives of Canada and the Canadian Nurses Association (CNA). The Canadian Nurses Foundation is committed to raising funds to support this collection.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> The Canadian Nursing History Collection began with the transfer of items from CNA to the signatory partners. Although not its primary mandate, CNA has documented its activities in Canada, and around the world, and preserved the story of nursing in Canada since it was founded in 1908.



#### References:

Alberta Association of Registered Nurses. (2003). *Nursing history: AARN museum & archives*. Retrieved June 24, 2003 from http://www.nurses.ab.ca/museum/intro.html

American Association for the History of Nursing. (2001). *Position paper – Nursing history in the curriculum: Preparing nurses for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.* Retrieved October 1, 2003 from http://www.aahn.org/position.html

Davies, C. (Ed.). (1980). Rewriting nursing history. London: Croom Helm.

McPherson, K. (1996). Bedside matters: The transformation of Canadian nursing, 1900-1990. Toronto: Oxford University Press.

Nurses Association of New Brunswick. (2003). *Nursing history research*. Retrieved October 1, 2003 from http://www.nanb.nb.ca/index.cfm?include=history2

Registered Nurses Association of British Columbia. (2003). *Nursing and research* policy statement. Retrieved June 24, 2003 from http://www.rnabc.bc.ca/pdf/94.pdf

#### Also see:

Canadian Association for the History of Nursing (http://www.ualberta.ca/~jhibberd/CAHN\_ACHN/)

Canadian Nurses Foundation (http://www.canadiannursesfoundation.com/english/cnhc\_heritage.htm)

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