

A Practice Manual for Community Nursing in Australia

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This anthology (Kralik *et al.* 2008) is a companion text to Kralik and van Loon's (2008) book *Community nursing in Australia*. However, whereas Kralik and van Loon's companion text is more conceptual and theoretical, this anthology by Kralik *et al.* is more pragmatic and makes considerable use of dot points throughout the text in order to cover an extensive amount of information yet be as succinct as possible.

The text comprises 23 chapters mostly written by current or former nurses with one psychologist (Megan O'Donnell), but even her chapter (Chapter 17), on caring for older people, is co-authored with two nurses. This a valuable chapter upholding the view that evidence-based practice can be implemented when community nurses visit older people in their home environment. Like the other chapters it is quite practical in its approach and displays a valuable table of age related changes according to domain (e.g. bowel, buccal cavity, hearing, vision), associated issues, assessments, possible interventions and resources.

Initially however, the 'scene' of the text is set by the opening chapter ('Approaches to community nursing care: Chapter 1') written by Antonia van Loon who was a foundation member of the Community Nursing Association in Australia and is well admired not only for her dedication but because of her informative writing and conference presentations. Her chapter establishes the legal and professional background factors, principles of primary health care, the nurses approach to care, the community nursing role, approaches to care in a multicultural Australia, the needs of vulnerable community groups, providing research/evidence for practice, client self-management and the future impact of market forces, which emphasizes the important and cost effective role that community nurses can have by ensuring that appropriate and timely referrals do actually occur.

It is of course not possible to discuss all the chapters in detail, or we might as well have written our own text. Needless to say the book is comprehensive covering such topics as clinical governance (Chap. 2), incident management and mandatory reporting (Chap. 5), chronic conditions (Chap. 8), addiction and homelessness (Chap. 10), continence (Chap. 11), diabetes (Chap. 12), vascular access device management (Chap. 13), child and maternal health (Chap. 14), medication support (Chap. 15), nutritional support (Chap. 16), personal care (Chap. 19), stoma care (Chap. 20), wound management (Chap. 21), systematic reactions and anaphylaxis (Chap. 22) plus new and emerging technologies that can support community nurses (Chap. 23).

Some chapters drew our particular attention, namely Chapter 3, 'informed consent' by Elizabeth Crock. Given that

there seems (at least in our opinion) a declining respect about the importance of ethical principles, it is a pleasant surprise to see this chapter to add to the nursing literature. While it would have been even better to have seen the key bioethical principles of autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence and justice clearly stated and reinforced within this text (indeed these are not mentioned as an inter-relating collective anywhere in the text), the text does at least define informed consent as 'a person's autonomous authorisation of specific medical intervention or participation in research' (p. 33). The chapter then explores the historical perspective of consent, justification for informed consent, required information, the consent process and benefits, the meaning and problems with competency assessments, surrogate decision makers, informed refusal, implied or tacit consent, children and the disabled and future trends in relation to advance directives and consent to health promotion and research.

Chapter 4 by Turner *et al.* looks at the very important 'assessment' role of community nurses with regard to a client's independence and ability to remain in the general community. It is a good overview. It notes independence as 'the actual or perceived state in which people maintain, adjust, access or exchange physical, cognitive and social support, spiritual, housing and financial resources within social, cultural, political and economic environments in order to maximise self-care and ability and control over the course of daily life'. A comprehensive definition for sure, but the chapter fails to fully address all these issues narrowing it down to functional capacity, attentional demands, cognitive function, nutritional health and environment; thus minimalising what potentially was very holistic in approach. What happened for example, to spiritual assessment? What happened to financial assessment? These may not be the direct responsibility of the community nurse, but surely even the most basic assessment may mean a productive referral to assist the client and most certainly will 'promote health, focus on prevention and provide support that encourages clients in their independence'. There are some very useful diagrams in this chapter, though these need expanding to be more inclusively comprehensive by listing other allied health care practitioners (e.g. physiotherapist, chaplain) rather than just citing 'specialist consultants' as this could mean a variety of things. Most certainly what is a valuable inclusion within this chapter is the note about an 'informal carer needs assessment' to ensure appropriate sustainability of carers.

In Chapter 6, despite the title's community focus, the authors seem to lack comprehensive first hand community experience and apparently try to apply hospital guidelines in

community settings, spending a lot of time getting there. Apart from once again reproducing some national guidelines it is almost entirely unspecific so that although we are told about various risks we never really find out what they are. There are in fact many infection control issues in community nursing – community acquires pneumonias, various viral, fungal and bacterial diseases, community acquired wound infections, legionellosis, intestinal infections, and various interesting arthropod-borne and zoonotic diseases for starters. This disappointing chapter reads rather like a student essay; for example

Providing safe and quality health care is a complex business. . . Preventing health care acquired infections (HCAIs) is high on the agenda of quality and safety of health care. . . Public trust and confidence in our hospitals as clean and safe places continues to be challenged by HCAIs. . . Wherever health care is provided HCAI is a risk. . . Infectious agents are present in almost all health care settings. . . (p. 95)

and so on, and on. . . lacking any real content.

Disaster planning and management (surely this should read 'Planning and management of disasters?') is the topic for Chapter 7 (Paul Arbon). This well-written chapter summarises the principles of emergency and disaster response efforts quite comprehensively, although the other phases of emergency management (preparedness, recovery and rehabilitation), crucial parts of community response, are but dealt with only scantily. Emergencies are considered only on a national level; local DISPLANS and structures for declaring emergencies seem to be missing, which is a shame because even disasters on the scale of the 2009 summer Queensland floods and Victorian wildfires were dealt with at state level. The chapter also describes how hospitals will cope (or not cope when overwhelmed), but does not address how this might be mitigated.

Chapter 9 (Curtis *et al.*) provides an informative overview of mental health issues with a particular focus upon New South Wales. The authors point out that the community nurse is often the first point of call for people who are experiencing mental health problems. The chapter affirms a biopsychosocial approach to mental health incorporating biological, sociological, developmental, medical, drug and alcohol, environmental, cultural and spiritual assessments. Unfortunately the chapter tends to neglect the cultural and spiritual factors (seemingly common throughout the text) but it does provide some very useful insert boxes with key points regarding thought disorders, delusions (where it does at least mention religious delusions) and different types of hallucinations (e.g. auditory, visual, olfactory, gustatory, tactile). It also looks at reducing risk (e.g. suicide) and managing aggression, medications and some legal considerations.

A very important chapter, given the increasing need to advance health promoting palliative care, is Chapter 18

(Cathy Bennett and Dianne Roughton). Similar to the rest of the text, dot points are used to cover a great deal of material about holistic palliative care, assessment tools such as genograms and ecomaps, symptom management, pain management, oncological emergencies, psycho-spiritual issues (which we think should be titled psycho-social, cultural and spiritual issues), bereavement support and various professional support networks. It is unfortunate, however, that this chapter, while recognising the 'mental suffering' experienced by many palliative care patients about 'whether there is life after death or merely oblivion' (p. 391), fails to suggest the appropriate pastoral care, spiritual or religious support networks and personnel that can be provided via pastoral care units (which are now well established within most health care institutions), or even to utilise chaplains or local clergy to undertake a spiritual assessment and, if appropriate, apply recognised pastoral interventions (e.g. pastoral assessment, support, counselling, education, ritual/worship ministry). Alternatively some faith groups also provide a parish-faith community nurse to assist with such a service about which these authors could learn from the author of Chapter 1 (Antonia van Loon).

There are some other irritations with this text. It suffers from a common problem in referencing, born partly of an antipathy to any reference older than a few years, so that some useful and well-developed ideas (genograms is one example) appear to have been developed as a part of a nursing course rather than from their real origins in the social sciences; not returning to original texts is a growing problem in referencing, and it is not good to see it reproduced in this book. Indeed, some of the references are missing, and several more are of the hidden telescoped variety where the author summarises the work of someone else's summary. This is bad academic practice; we encourage students to go to original sources but what hope do we have if it is practiced by academic authors?

One final criticism – particularly as it is such a large text – the book could have been divided into sections or parts to make it a little more manageable for the reader. Nevertheless, we recommend this book as a practical and very useful manual to train and practice in the field of community nursing and congratulate the editors for an extensive anthology that will be valuable not only for community nurses but other allied health professionals as well.

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