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Changes in Philosophy of Nursing

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Abstract

Philosophy is an integral part of any discipline/profession. It is more than just a platform, rather an anchor on which the stability of the discipline is built. In a similar manner, the nursing profession has a strong philosophical basis. This has been derived from various theories, sociological and political views, and the changes occurring scientifically, differences in thought processes, and the felt needs of the patients and nurses themselves, which can't be denied. All these are paving the way towards change in the traditional philosophy of nursing and leading nursing in a completely new direction. It is the basis of the change that one will see in the discipline over time. These changing concepts have been discussed in this article.

Keywords-Philosophy, nursing, change

Introduction

Philosophy is essential for any discipline to grow and flourish. It gives direction to a discipline and activities performed within and for the discipline. Nursing as a discipline has its own philosophy which has developed over time and is enriched by various theories. The nursing philosophy is the guiding force of values, ethics, and beliefs of the profession. Within the philosophy of any discipline including nursing, there are more specific concepts or branches such as epistemology, ontology, axiology and so on which constitute the philosophy of that discipline.

Philosophy is the guiding force that acts as the platform for a profession, specifically a discipline, to rise above the rest. In the modern context, philosophy should be such that it is dynamic, sensitive to the changing time, and incorporates the various changes that are being witnessed. The philosophy of a discipline must not only highlight the basic idea and roots from which the discipline has flourished but also must be in tune with the flow of the modern world, its cultural and social values, technological inventions, and changed norms and traditions.

Sources of Philosophy in Nursing

The philosophy of the Nursing profession is derived from a variety of sources. It is rooted deep into various concepts that lead the profession. For ages, many philosophies have existed and guided the way humans think and act in various situations. These include classical view, theocratic view, empiricism, rationalism, idealism, positivism, pragmatism, phenomenology, and so on (1). Many post-modernist views exist too (2). These philosophies give rise to paradigms or views about the world as real or ideal. A student of philosophy is well aware of these views.

The philosophy is not a stand-alone concept and is also related to theory, practice, policies, issues within the nursing practice, answered or unanswered, and so on. We all know that these sources must be relevant and useful in order to make sense of the phenomena around us. The knowledge is also rooted through the various ideas and concepts basic to other disciplines which are part and parcel of the nursing profession. These ideas are represented through various philosophies of science and are dealt with through nursing science, research, and practice to bring change within the profession (3).

Traditional Philosophical views in Nursing

Traditional nursing is based on the various views that have existed over time. The basic core factors that make up a philosophy including epistemology, axiology, and ontology were different traditionally than what we find today. The traditional society and culture offered different knowledge sources and cultural taboos. There was a different perspective towards nurses and nursing.

The epistemology of nursing was initially derived from various conventional sources available at that time. The various views included empiricism, idealism, rationalism, constructivism, and positivism. These views were important as various theories and conceptual frameworks were built on these views and were carried over for many years. These were the guiding principles based on which the previous generations of nurses including Post-war, Baby boomers, and Gen X (4) have provided nursing care and built the knowledge basis within the nursing profession.

The ontology of nursing or the concepts central to nursing have always been caring, compassion, ethics, and its view as art. The four essential pillars of the practice include person, nursing, environment, and health, also called the meta-paradigm in nursing (5). The theories included in the grand and middle-range theories were the earliest theories that guided the nursing profession and helped in the formulation of the philosophical basis of the profession (6). In retrospective view, Nursing was a female dominant profession due to the innate value of caring and humanism present in women and therefore, feminism was always highlighted as a core value at many platforms (7), thus, popularizing the term “lady with the lamp”.

The axiological concepts which have always guided the discipline customarily include a caring approach, following all ethical values, having an objective, and promotion of health with prevention of diseases. It guided the approach one requires for improving the profession and the discipline (8). It guided the theory and research approach and traditionally was experimental and descriptive in nature. The research approach and professionalism helped nursing shape into a separate discipline with its own advanced body of knowledge undergoing changes even today.

Changing concepts

Modern nursing is undergoing changes and so are its philosophical concepts. These changes are often witnessed in theory and practice. These include changes and improvement in epistemology, ontology, axiology, and ethics due to the ongoing endeavors of the nurses, the changes in the world and the environment, and the vision to improve and sharpen the nursing service (practice, research, theory, education, and administration).

Let's see what changes have occurred and what is expected to occur in the coming times.

Increased research evidence collected over time, has *improved the epistemological basis* of the philosophy of nursing knowledge. The knowledge generated has influenced nursing as a profession and its various aspects. Research has the capability to generate

concepts and improve them for the purpose of better performance and output of nursing care activities. Nurses worldwide undertake a variety of research using various methods of research (qualitative and quantitative or both) in order to generate knowledge, challenge old beliefs and shun the unrequired from the discipline (9).

Changes in views and frameworks have also impacted the philosophy of the nursing profession. The views mostly influencing the modern practice have moved away from positivist to non-positivist views along with modern views of humanism, progressivism, existentialism, behaviorism, and eclecticism (10). The traditional thought from received knowledge has now been slowly transitioning to perceived values and interpretative thought processes (11). The emphasis now is to strike a balance between not only the objective (quantitative) sources of knowledge but also subjective (qualitative) sources of phenomenology, grounded theory, and ethnography. It is now held that none of the sources of knowledge should be negated as they provide the basis for the development of core values of the nursing profession in the changing patterns of social and economic life also called epistemological pluralism.

Changes in the gender roles within the profession are also recent. Changes in the feminist views in nursing have led to a more eclectic workforce. The concern today is to identify nursing, not as a feminine or masculine profession but an all-inclusive profession where the manpower has the sole concern to ably care and promote health (12,13). The philosophy of nursing from a feminist one is now moving on to a gender-neutral one.

Changes in paradigms that have been the source and basis of epistemology are changing too. Firstly, there is advocacy to look into and treat the meta-paradigms not as separate entities but interdependent on one another. Secondly, there is a shift from the concept of meta to mid paradigm (14). This has resulted from the fact that these meta-paradigms are immensely abstract due to which their application into practice is not easy (15). Thirdly, many new paradigms specific to specialty, theory and practice are being propounded for better application into the practice (16-18). Thus, paradigm shift and adjustment are part and parcel of the nursing discipline (19). They are and will be a guiding force in the growth of the nursing profession and discipline.

Extension of ethics and ethical principles has occurred in the nursing profession. With the boom in the digitalization of nursing, cyberethics needs to be built into the philosophy of nursing. Research ethics also had been existed since long and have been reframed and updated from time to time. The philosophy must contemplate these principles as well. Modern nursing has revised its code of ethics (20) to reflect this change and highlighted the importance of protecting information and maintaining “data integrity”. Moreover, with the changes in the social and cultural realm, newer issues have arisen, for example, social issues of sexual orientation, surrogacy, infertility, organ transplantation, genetic manipulation, social media presence, intense gaming; economic and cultural issues of the war crisis, terrorist attacks and abductions, mass migration and displacement, global issues like a pandemic, disasters, mental health issues and so on which require us to have a deeper look into our ethical outlook and work on updating the existing practice so that issues could be addressed over time in a most ethical manner (21-24).

Changes in theories for bridging theory-practice gaps are being propagated. “What we learn in the classroom must be replicated in the practice”. The theory-practice gap in nursing is one of the issues due to differences in various theories, knowledge sources, non-application of principles learned into practice owing to various issues (personal and professional), and hindrances (25). The current strategy suggested to get over these limitations is to develop a meta-theory that will be all-inclusive and include all the essential aspects of various nursing theories (26). A meta-synthesis of various nursing concepts is being undertaken as a way forward in promoting effective theory practice equilibrium in nursing (27).

Towards one’s own personal philosophy in nursing is the recent concept where every new nurse shapes her own personal philosophy. It is important not to follow what others think nursing should be, but rather a nursing student must make conscious

efforts to understand what nursing is to him/her and then proceed further. This is important for the sake of further advancement of the discipline of nursing (28-30). Thus, an eclectic approach to philosophy building in nursing is the trend seen today.

Conclusion

The philosophy of nursing science and practice will undergo changes in the light of the changing concepts. Many changes have occurred and many are going to occur with the changing social, economic, political, and personal profile. It is important to mention here that if a professional wishes to grow it has to endure these changes and sustain itself during these adjustments. In this way only, nursing will grow as a profession and as a discipline.

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