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Review of: Magnussen H. (2017) The Moral Work of Nursing – Asking and Living with the Questions

Nico Nortjé

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Article abstract

A narrative description of personal moral challenges of a nurse serving diverse communities.

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COMPTE RENDU / REVIEW



Review of: Magnussen H. (2017) *The Moral Work of Nursing – Asking and Living with the Questions*

Nico Nortjé¹

Résumé

Une description narrative des défis moraux personnels d'une infirmière au service de diverses communautés.

Mots-clés

éthique infirmière, santé communautaire, diversité culturelle, bioéthique mondiale

Abstract

A narrative description of personal moral challenges of a nurse serving diverse communities.

Keywords

nursing ethics, community health, cultural diversity, global bioethics

The Moral Work of Nursing – Asking and Living with the Questions [1] is both a reflection on Hazel Magnussen's personal journey as a nurse and a report on developments in health care in Canada. Magnussen illustrates how the social, economic and political changes of the past half century have influenced the nursing profession and the health and well-being of nurses. This book successfully illustrates that nursing is not only a physically and mentally demanding vocation, but also one riddled with moral questions and conundrums, and that ethical reflection is essential in the moral work of nursing. Moral work includes advocating for patients and requires facing dilemmas in which there could be a breach of a nurse's duty to another. With its skillful integration of anecdotal reflections and scholarly arguments, this book challenges readers to think critically about their own positions in health care and how they can effect change.

The book describes the many issues that nurses face on a daily basis in community health nursing, primary care settings and professional nursing at large. There are four broad themes: the practical application of and approach to nursing knowledge; the institutional challenges faced by nurses; the political reforms affecting the profession; and the social and technological problems that could create ethical challenges for nurses. Of particular interest is one of three new chapters in this second edition, namely a chapter on how the new Canadian law legalising assisted death influences nurses' practice. Magnussen draws on her own personal journey in this chapter when she reflects on the death of her husband, Lloyd. She illustrates why it is important for society to support and take care of health care providers who are involved in providing end-of-life care. Each chapter offers pearls of wisdom and ends with thought-provoking questions that challenge readers to reflect upon what they have read and how they can apply it in their own settings.

This book makes an important contribution to the field of global bioethics in that the author reflects on her time practicing in Alaska and in remote areas of Canada, such as the Baffin Region in the Northwest Territories, the island hamlet of Igloolik close to the Melville Peninsula, and Frobisher Bay. She convincingly argues that in order to adequately serve culturally diverse populations, nurses need to work to remove the vestiges of colonial approaches to medicine and focus instead on upholding local value systems. Respecting First Nations and their traditions will enable health care professionals to build partnerships among individuals, families and communities that will be beneficial to the successful implementation of health care programs. The Canadian population in general is becoming more diverse, and applying the principles of global bioethics will become crucial for the development of sustainable health care practices that enshrine respect for patients [2,3].

Furthermore, this book contributes to the growing body of knowledge on burnout among nurses [4]. What is particularly useful is the way that the author destigmatises burnout, refuting the notion that only the weak can suffer from burnout. She also describes practical ways that nurses can alleviate pressure by making personal mental health a priority, focusing on the wisdom of the cartoon "Ziggy": if you are going to take care of others, you first need to take care of yourself [5]. As with the first edition, the book's frank discussion about workplace abuse (emotional, physical and sexual) stands out, drawing the attention of the reader to the fact that many nurses are victims and arguing that there needs to be a collective stand against abuse and bullying.

This book reads easily and persuasively, and the focus on lived experiences makes it accessible for the general public as well as clinicians. Magnussen has succeeded in giving us a look into her life, her struggles, her accomplishments, and that which gives her joy. This is truly a book for those interested in thoughtful reflections on the intricacies of life.

Conflit d'intérêts

L'auteur est éditeur à la *Revue canadienne de bioéthique*. Il n'a pas participé à l'évaluation du manuscrit.

Conflicts of Interest

The author is an editor at the *Canadian Journal of Bioethics*. He was not involved in the evaluation of the manuscript.

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