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Nursing a grievance

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Nursing a grievance

Abstract

Nurses, both in Australia and overseas, have long felt they are denied appropriate professional recognition for their role in the operation of the health system in which they work. In her book, *Nursing and the Injustices of the Law*, Megan-Jane Johnstone argues that nurses are not recognised as an autonomous profession, and at the same time are exploited by patriarchal medical profession whose views are legitimated and reenforced by law. She argues that even with reforms that are said to expand the legal practice of nursing, the autonomous and professional status of the nurse has not improved. She suggests that the medical and legal profession, two male dominated professions, act in a way that maintains the subordinate position of the nurse. To combat this situation, Ms. Johnstone urges that the nursing profession is in need of the development of a nursing jurisprudence whereby nurses can attain legal authority that matches their responsibilities as health care professionals. The book rightly argues that historically the law, in conjunction with the legal profession, has trivialised the role of the nurse, particularly the tendency of judges, lawyers and doctors to disregard the role of the nurse. The book examines feminist jurisprudential research to draw support for the view that the law, in general, is oppressive and inequitable in its treatment of women.

NURSING A GRIEVANCE

Patricia Blazey-Ayoub

Megan-Jane Johnstone. *Nursing and the Injustices of the Law*. VVB Saunders, 1994. \$44.95.

Nurses, both in Australia and overseas, have long felt they are denied appropriate professional recognition for their role in the operation of the health system in which they work. In her book, *Nursing and the Injustices of the Law*, Megan-Jane Johnstone argues that nurses are not recognised as an autonomous profession, and at the same time are exploited by patriarchal medical profession whose views are legitimated and re-enforced by law. She argues that even with reforms that are said to expand the legal practice of nursing, the autonomous and professional status of the nurse has not improved. She suggests that the medical and legal profession, two male dominated professions, act in a way that maintains the subordinate position of the nurse. To combat this situation, Ms. Johnstone urges that the nursing profession is in need of the development of a nursing jurisprudence whereby nurses can attain legal authority that matches their responsibilities as health care professionals. The book rightly argues that historically the law, in conjunction with the legal profession, has trivialised the role of the nurse, particularly the tendency of judges, lawyers and doctors to disregard the role of the nurse. The book examines feminist jurisprudential research to draw support for the view that the law, in general, is oppressive and inequitable in its treatment of women.

Clearly the aim of the book aim is to raise the consciousness of nurses about their current status in the medical hierarchy, and indeed it achieves this aim. The medical profession is rightly attacked for its treatment of nurses, which has created a culture of subordinating the nurse through subtle 'duty to obey' tactics. Ms. Johnstone explores how the nurse is manipulated to carry out doctors' orders that may be inappropriate, and examines the powerlessness of the nurse in such a situation.

The final chapter proposes a number of strategies for change. A criticism of this chapter is that it is too short, comprising only 8 pages. Minimal treatment is given to topics such as legal education, scholarship, and research. The author could have explored in more detail the requirement for a substantial legal component in nursing education - one that would cover all aspects of the various medico-legal fields. Methods of infiltrating and raising the consciousness of the medical profession, so that the autonomy of the nursing profession is recognised, could also have been addressed. For instance, there is a need for nurses to engage in critical writing of the medical and legal professions and their archaic attitudes.

Notwithstanding this criticism of the book is to instil in the reader a real desire to bring about change, Mrs. Johnson has accomplished that goal.