‘Personal pride in developing the profession’

Fiona Timmins, senior lecturer at Trinity College Dublin, explains how a commitment to evidence-based nursing and empowerment have spurred her on

My grandmother trained as a nurse in the UK in the 1920s. An aunt followed a similar pathway. Nostalgic photographs and the pride associated with belonging to a noble profession remained with me from childhood. For me the profession of nursing had an important societal function, symbolised by autonomy, caring and a specialist form of knowledge.

Securing a place and qualifying as a general nurse in 1988 at Frimley Park Hospital in Surrey reaffirmed this pride and set the scene for my approach to nursing throughout my career. Nursing was a truly satisfying occupation.

As a relatively new hospital founded in the 1970s, the School of Nursing had embraced new ideas about nursing and had adopted the Roper-Logan-Tierney model of nursing as the focus of its curriculum. Staff and students were involved in devising and updating care plans. The nursing care for patients was planned, operated and evaluated regularly and individually. I also experienced firsthand a holistic, respectful and individual-focused approach to students by hospital staff. Using research to inform practice was also a feature that was encouraged in assessments and nursing practice.

After qualification, I worked in a variety of other settings. I observed for the first time nursing care practices in the traditional medical model. Sometimes patients were nursed according only to their illness and not holistically, even if more modern approaches were espoused. There was a focus on tasks, unnecessary routine and rituals, and getting the work done. I also experienced a dominant hierarchy that adversely affected staff morale. Challenging some of these ways of working, as a nurse and later as an academic, drew its influence from my beliefs about nursing and my previous experience.
I specialised in coronary care nursing after completing an intensive and coronary care nursing certificate in 1992. I obtained a degree in nursing studies from University College Dublin in 1997, and an MSc in educational management from Trinity College Dublin. These studies and a long association with the Nursing Faculty of Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland fostered and enthused my interest in evidence-based practice and using a knowledge base for nursing care. I was also interested in the healthcare environment, particularly in relation to empowerment. These interests led me to a career in teaching and, following a three-year period in St James’s Hospital as a nurse tutor, I moved to Trinity College Dublin in 2000, where I currently work. My primary area of interest is the professional development of nursing; I also research and write about nurse education and cardiac nursing.

My first nursing textbook (Contemporary Issues in Coronary Care Nursing) focused on an approach to nursing care based on holistic evidence. I aimed to summarise and simplify the nursing research and nursing theory that relates to coronary care practice. Although conscious of growing scepticism about the use of nursing models in practice, I examined the evidence base that informed conceptual models – to provide nurses with simplified information about models of nursing and frameworks for the analysis, application and adaptation of conceptual models of nursing. In addition, I examined patient education and ways to apply and critically analyse research. I have also researched and written about assertiveness skills and communication.

I have been fortunate that my career has spanned an era when nursing in the UK and Ireland developed strong links with third level education. It has been an exciting time in which opportunities have arisen to extend nurses’ knowledge through further study and research. As a culmination of my personal studies, I was awarded a PhD in nursing by the University of Glamorgan in 2006. Research and knowledge development foster thoughtful nursing practice and assist with the professional development of nursing. This bolsters my personal pride in the profession and assures me that the nursing practices I admire will grow and develop in the years to come.

Fiona Timmins PhD, MSc, MA (Juri Offici), FFNRSCI, NFESC, BSc (open), BNS, RNT, RGN is senior lecturer, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland.