Transforming Nursing Practice with Lessons from Nursing History

Karen M. O’Connell, PhD, RN, CEN, NEA-BC
Department of Nursing, Northern Kentucky University, Highland Heights, KY, USA

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The media today provides the public and nursing profession a view into perceptions of the past and current status of the profession of nursing. While media includes printed works, movies and television, this presentation will focus on an analysis of contemporary television productions set in various eras of nursing history. Three television series recently broadcast on public television in the United States included: "Crimson Field (BBC, 2018b), Call the Midwife (BBC, 2018a), and Mercy Street (PBS, 2016). Three impactful areas on nursing will be examined for each series: culture, gender and the lasting changes in health care and other systems.

*Mercy Street* focuses on nursing in a military hospital in Virginia during the Civil War. Nurses include individuals, self-trained through the personal experience of nursing family members to one nurse, formally trained by Florence Nightingale. Gender, race and social class affect nurses’ position and work during this time. Infectious disease also plays a large role in the military health system.

Jumping fifty years forward, is the series, *Crimson Field* where a British military field hospital in France during World War I provided a backdrop for stories involving nurses and Red Cross volunteers. The nurses’ treatment, especially of the ‘Matron-in-Chief’, of the volunteers reminds us of the poor treatment nurses still inflict on one another. The war wounds seen during this period were unlike any seen before and affected the healthcare team unlike any previous war.

Another 40 years later is the setting for the series, *Call the Midwife*. This series focuses on a nursing organization providing midwife services in a low-income neighborhood in England spanning from the mid 1950’s to early 1960’s. As many novice nurses experience, expectations of a nursing career are not always aligned with reality. However, the relationships with our patients and peers often overshadow the harsh realities we are dealt. Interesting in this video series, we see the circular nature of healthcare.

Similarities and differences between previous and current casualty care are reviewed. Multiple healthcare advances resulted from the battlefield and are highlighted within the discussion. Findings related to gender, race and social class are contrasted with themes evidenced in contemporary television shows such as *Code Black* and *Chicago Med*. While similarities remain, some trends to more gender and ethnic equality can be seen. Themes identified by Ashley (1976) in *Hospital, Paternalism and the Role of the Nurse* continue to be seen and there remain many challenges for the public portrayal of the role of nursing. Are stereotypes being perpetuated?

Contemporary media has a significant impact for future nurses, nurses currently active in the profession, and the general public. Illuminating the public’s perceptions of nursing professionals will empower nurses to influence future nursing portrayals in the media. Respect for the nursing profession will grow and future nurses will take their equal standing with other healthcare professionals in the transformation of healthcare.

Title:
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Abstract Summary:
Nursing is a young profession; however, we have not learned from our predecessors. We chose to evaluate current nursing practice with a look to our past as presented in the media. Both positive and negative changes in nursing practice were explored. History informs nursing's transformation if we listen.

Content Outline:
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Content Outline

1. Introduction
   1. Recent media productions accurately portray historical nursing practice.
   2. A historical look at culture, gender and power structure in healthcare systems will be compared to current media portrayals.

2. Mercy Street (PBS, 2018)
   1. Stories of nurses on opposite sides in an US Civil War military hospital
      1. The impact of gender, race and social class
      2. Infectious disease and the Civil War
      3. Lasting changes to healthcare
2. A retired Air Force nurse who served in an OPERATION Iraqi Freedom theater hospital will compare experiences to those portrayed in the Civil War military hospitals
   1. Similarities – austere conditions; minimal ‘down time’; horrific wounds; compassion fatigue; worry about families left behind
   2. Differences – advanced technology available in the field; improved living conditions; increased nurse autonomy; improved relationship with other healthcare providers
3. Crimson Field (BBC, 2018b)
   1. Stories of the nurses and volunteers in a British field hospital during World War I
      1. Evolution of the trained nurses' treatment of the Red Cross volunteers
      2. Caring for soldiers with horrific wounds not seen in previous battles
      3. Lasting changes to healthcare
   2. The relationships between healthcare professionals in this environment and time are explored
      1. Relationship between the 'Matron-in-Chief', the trained nurses, and the volunteers
      2. Relationships between the nursing staff and the wounded soldiers
      3. Relationships between the physicians and nursing staff
4. Call the Midwife (BBC, 2018a)
   1. Stories of midwife services in a low-income neighborhood in England
      1. "First day" stories – excitement, fear, unexpected events
      2. Mentorship between the nurses
      3. Friendships with patients
   2. Positive and negative changes from the 1960s to current midwifery practice are explored
      1. Institutionalization of birth
      2. Move through general anesthetic to 'natural' labor
5. Current and Future Practice
   1. Historical cultural influence and societal expectations are contrasted with current media healthcare portrayals
   2. Historical roles for individuals of different genders, social class and race are contrasted with current media healthcare portrayals
6. Conclusion
   1. Paternalism continues to be a part of the nurse’s role in the media
   2. Nurses must expand and exert their power to influence future media portrayals to eliminate stereotypes

First Primary Presenting Author

Primary Presenting Author
Karen M. O'Connell, PhD, RN, CEN, NEA-BC
Northern Kentucky University
Department of Nursing
Associate Professor
College of Health Professions
Highland Heights KY
USA

Professional Experience: 2017 – Present; Assistant Professor, College of Health Professions, Department of Nursing Northern Kentucky University, Highland Heights, KY 1993 – 2017; United States Air Force Nurse Corps Multiple assignments including emergency/trauma care; Flight nursing; nursing education; and nursing administration; deployed to Iraq in support of OPERATION Iraqi Freedom; deployed to Kuwait in support of OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM 2008 - 2012; PhD student, Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, MD Dissertation: “Evaluating the Joint Theater Trauma Registry to Benchmark Care of Casualties with TBI”

Author Summary: Dr. Karen O’Connell is Assistant Professor of Nursing at Northern Kentucky University. She is a retired Air Force Nurse Corps Officer with two deployments to Southeast Asia. Her
research focus is care of the wounded warrior. Dr. O'Connell believes those who do not learn from history are destined to repeat it. She is using historically accurate media to empower nursing’s future.