The New Zealand nurse practitioner polemic: A discourse analysis

A thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Nursing

Massey University Wellington New Zealand

Jillian Ann Wilkinson 2007
Abstract

The purpose of this research has been to trace the development of the nurse practitioner role in New Zealand. Established in 2001, this advanced nursing practice role was birthed amid controversy as historical forces at play both inside and outside nursing struggled for power to control the future of the profession. Using a discourse analytical approach informed by the work of Michel Foucault, the study foregrounds the discourses that have constructed the nurse practitioner role within the New Zealand social and political context. Discourses, as explained by Foucault, are bodies of knowledge construed to be ‘truth’ and connected to power by reason of this assumption, serving to fix norms and making it virtually impossible to think outside them. Discourses of nursing and of medicine have established systems of disciplinary practices that produce nurses and physicians within defined role boundaries, not because of legislation, but because discourse has constructed certain rules. The nurse practitioner role transcends those boundaries and offers the possibility of a new and potentially more liberating identity for nurses and nursing.

A plural approach of both textuality and discursivity was used to guide the analysis of texts chosen from published literature and from nine interviews conducted with individuals who have been influential in the unfolding of the nurse practitioner role. Both professionally and industrially and in academic and regulatory terms dating back to the Nurses Registration Act, 1901, the political discourses and disciplinary practices serving to position nurses in the health care sector and to represent nursing are examined. The play of these forces has created an interstice from which the nurse practitioner role in New Zealand could emerge.

In combination with a new state regime of primary health care, the notion of an autonomous nursing profession in both practice and regulation has challenged medicine’s traditional right to surveillance of nursing practice. Through a kind of regulated freedom, the availability of assessment, diagnostic and prescribing practices within a nursing discourse signals a radical shift in how nursing can be represented. The nurse practitioner polemic has revolutionised the nursing subject, and may in turn lead to a qualitatively different health service.
Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the people who have contributed to this research. Firstly, the study participants who so generously gave their time in interviews and transcript checking; thank you for sharing your experiences and bringing life to this project.

My supervisors, Dr Jean Gilmour and Dr Annette Huntington, have been infinitely patient. At every visit you conveyed confidence in my ability and not once did I leave either office feeling inadequate or in despair. Looking back over my earlier writing, I can only imagine what you really thought. Thank you for your experience, your guidance and wisdom.

Receiving financial support in the form of a Massey University Doctoral Scholarship has allowed me to engage in this project on a full-time basis. I am also grateful to the Torhaven Trust, which has met the costs of university fees in the last year of the project.

I have received much interest and support from family, friends and colleagues who have heard me out at various times throughout the project. Also, Sam Seaborn, who reminded me if we look closely at the chaos around us, patterns emerge. I am especially grateful to Chris and Karen, who lent me their beautiful house in which to retreat and write, and particularly Chris, on whom I ‘cut my teeth’. The equivalent of Hawke’s Bay sunshine and a dog asleep at my feet seem to be prerequisites for really good writing now. My thanks also to Tonya for walking that dog (between sleeps) – he loves you dearly. Special thanks to Esther Kiernan, my niece, for proofreading the final draft.

In particular, I want to thank my husband Graeme and son Jeremy. Graeme, you are, as always, a tower of strength; and Jeremy – yes, it is finally over!
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**PHOTOGRAPH**

*Figure 1: Is that a nurse? Stu McKellar Bassett, (photographer). 2002. Used with permission. 228*
List of Abbreviations

ACC  Accident Compensation Corporation
APC  Annual Practising Certificate
ASMS Association of Salaried Medical Specialists
BN  Bachelor of Nursing
CCP  Clinical Career Pathway
CTA  Clinical Training Agency
DHB District Health Board
ECA  Employment Contracts Act
GMS  General Medical Subsidy
GP  General practitioner
HORAA Health Occupational Registration Acts Amendment
HPCA Health Practitioners Competence Assurance (Act)
HWAC Health Workforce Advisory Committee
ICN International Council of Nurses
IPA Independent Practitioner Association
MOH Ministry of Health
NCNZ Nursing Council of New Zealand
NENZ Nurse Executives in New Zealand
NETS Nurse Educators in the Tertiary Sector
NP Nurse practitioner
NPAC New Prescribers Advisory Committee
NPAC-NZ Nurse Practitioner Advisory Council New Zealand
NZMA New Zealand Medical Association
NZNA New Zealand Nurses’ Association
NZNO New Zealand Nurses Organisation
NZQA New Zealand Qualifications Authority
NZTNA New Zealand Trained Nurses’ Association
PHO Primary Health Organisation
QDAS Qualitative Data Analysis Software
RN Registered Nurse
RNZCGP Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners
SANS School of Advanced Nursing Studies