

## Editorial – Suicide as a Challenge in Psychiatric Nursing

*Susanne Kreutzer and Karen Nolte*

The focus of the 2023 issue is on suicide as a challenge for psychiatric nursing. The idea for the theme is based on the international conference „Suicide and its Prevention: Contemporary and Historical Perspectives in Nursing, 1880–2020“, which took place from 19-21 May 2022 in Leiden, the Netherlands, and was conceived by Cecile aan de Stegge and Manon Parry and organized in cooperation with the „European Association for the History of Nursing“. We would like to thank the organizers for allowing us to incorporate the three papers in the „European Journal for Nursing History and Ethics“. The articles focus on how suicide was addressed in the context of psychiatric institutions in the 19th and 20th centuries and the challenges faced by nursing staff in dealing with suicides.

In her contribution, Eva Yampolsky shows how the academic discipline of psychiatry, which emerged in France around 1800, took up the decriminalization of suicide in order to conceptualize the tendency to commit suicide as a medical problem. Referring to the „moral treatment“ developed by Pinel, Yampolsky reconstructs the therapeutic treatment of suicides and shows the role of nursing staff. Sabine Braunschweig analyzes the treatment of suicides in a psychiatric clinic in Basel, Switzerland, in the tense relationship between psychiatry as a coercive and regulatory institution and the progressive therapeutic approaches of the early 20th century, which aimed to give patients the greatest possible freedom and were based on a trusting relationship between nurses and patients. Catharina Th. Bakker's contribution deals with the perception of suicides by their fellow patients in psychiatric clinics between 1920 and 2020. Her analyses are based on autobiographical novels in which the authors describe their personal impressions of everyday psychiatric life from the perspective of patients. Bakker thus also provides insights into how the nursing staff were perceived by patients – a perspective that has rarely been included in nursing history research to date.

The cover picture of issue 5/2023 is by the artist Marcia Blaessle (1956–1983) and was made available to us by the „Prinzhorn Collection Heidelberg“ in Germany. The „Prinzhorn Collection Heidelberg“ is a museum for art by people with exceptional mental experiences. Its known historical holdings include around 8,000 drawings, watercolors, paintings, sculptures, textiles and texts created by inmates of psychiatric institutions between 1840 and 1945. Marcia Blaessle took LSD for the first time at the age of sixteen, like many young people at the time. She hoped to use the psychoactive substance to reduce or even deal with her fear of others and her own auto-aggressive tendencies. Therapies and living in communes followed. She began to study philosophy at the University of Frankfurt/Main. In 1981, Blaessle went to the Poona ashram in India for six months. However, all this work on herself did not help her. At the age of twenty-seven, she took her own life in a parachute jump. Her drawings, watercolors and paintings, created in the early 1970s and early 1980s, provide insight into the intrinsic laws of intoxicated perception and altered states of consciousness, ranging from visionary to

hallucinatory. They reflect the dreams and longings, worries and fears of their creator, who often portrays herself. Marcia Blaessle's work was donated to the „Prinzhorn Collection Heidelberg“ by her mother in 2002.

We would like to thank Thomas Röske, director of the Prinzhorn Collection Heidelberg, for his permission to use Blaessle's artwork as the cover picture and for the accompanying text.

We are pleased to present an article on object history, two Lost & Found papers and a forum contribution in the open section of this issue. Mienecke te Hennepe deals with objects that are commonly perceived as medical objects, but which first passed through the expert hands of nursing staff before being used by doctors – in this sense, te Hennepe takes a new nursing-historical perspective on surgical instruments, which she analyzes as „boundary objects“ between nursing and medicine. Iris van Versendaal and Hugo Schalkwijk focus on unusual finds from the museum collection of the Florence Nightingale Institute, namely objects that are closely entwined with protest actions by nurses in the Netherlands in the early 20th century and the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. Buttons, medals, song lyrics, gray literature and photographs are taken as the starting point for a history of nursing activism. Pierre Pfütsch presents a newly acquired collection from the Robert Bosch Foundation's Institute for the History of Medicine in Stuttgart, Germany, namely that of nursing expert and critic Claus Fussek. It is an extensive collection of folders filled to the brim with around 50,000 letters from private individuals reporting on grievances, acts of violence and problems in German nursing homes from the 1990s to 2021. Finally, Christoph Schwamm presents the state of research and research questions on the history of pediatric nursing in Germany.