

EDITORIAL – NURSING AND ECONOMICS

Susanne Kreutzer and Karen Nolte

Economic contexts have shaped the working conditions of nurses in various ways throughout history. Increasing marketisation in the healthcare sector has been noted and discussed since the 1960s, in particular in terms of the social and human costs for both nurses and patients. The articles in this special issue situate the marketisation of nursing in different social contexts, differentiate it from the principle of sound financial management in nursing, and thus contribute to the historicisation of the currently politically charged concept of marketisation. The articles focus on the transformation of nursing care in the second half of the 20th century and examine both the opportunities for nurses and the consequences that resulted from the adoption of market-oriented practices in the field of nursing.

The articles by Giordano Cotichelli and Susanne Kreutzer focus on the social upheavals of the 1950s and 1960s in Italy and West Germany. From the second half of the 1950s onwards, both countries experienced an enormous economic boom and the healthcare system was expanded. Cotichelli shows how nurses in Italy sought to take advantage of this situation – both in the context of trade union struggles to improve working conditions and pay, and in the context of efforts to develop the profession. Kreutzer uses the example of Christian sisterhoods to examine how the cost of nursing had to be recalculated in the course of the transformation processes. The introduction of a new time economy and the rise of professional administrators opened up nursing practice to business and administrative approaches. Nicole Kramer pursues an international comparative approach, linking the history of nursing with historical research on marketisation and neoliberalism. She analyses the early phase of privatisation of elderly and long-term care in the Federal Republic of Germany and Great Britain in the 1980s and 1990s and examines the economic ideas of the new care service and nursing home operators.

In the open section, two articles shed new light on the significance of Florence Nightingale. Carol Helmstadter uses the examples of four matrons to trace the enormous challenges faced by Nightingale's students as they attempted to anchor the basic principles of Nightingale Nursing in practice. The article deals with the resistance of hospital management and doctors as well as the motives and experiences of the four women, and discusses their failures, but also their successes. Christine Hallett's article is also dedicated to the transformation of the Nightingale system. She examines the difficulties involved in setting up the Indian Army Nursing Service and sheds light on the relationship between Catherine Grace Loch – the first Senior Lady Superintendent of the Indian Army Nursing Service – and her most important mentor, Florence Nightingale.

In the Lost and Found section, Mia Vrijens presents the diaries of district nurses that were written as part of a Dutch study project in the 1970s and are preserved in the archives of the Florence Nightingale Institute in the Netherlands. This study project was intended to contribute to the valorisation of district nursing by asking the women to document in their diaries the complexity of their work in this field, thereby providing evidence of their professionalism.