

Editorial

Letter from the Editor: New Tools

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New tools change lives. People decide how to perform a task, how to judge a completed task, and how to feel about the task, based upon the tool. Families usually keep more than one shovel because of this principle. A snow shovel won't dig up the earth for planting. The same is true in our work. New tools change how we practice and think about our profession. New tools can confuse or enthuse us. We decide and our decision impacts the world. We need to realize that standards shifts with technology development.

I heard a dean say that she denied that her school had a web page until it was updated. Now she feels proud of it. What she fails to remember is that the previous web page pushed the limits of technology in its day. Her standards moved with the developing technology. Many people used the tool three years ago in its imperfect state and found satisfaction. The present page also pushes the limits. Tomorrow the page will appear crude by the new standards the developing technology sets. How will the developing technology impact client teaching standards? I envision a time when clients are thoroughly taught standard materials from regional centers using technical communication tools while local personnel meet individual concerns.

New tools ease or solve old problems in new ways, and promote new ways of reaching new goals. Inventors constantly think about how to please, to save resources, and to promote universally recognized values. The tools bring with them new challenges for which no answer or tool is yet available. For instance, just as "outcome measures" becomes buzz words in rural

health, the realization that sometimes complexity cannot reduce to simplicity promotes new discussions.

Someone will offer methods of managing complexity while some of us begin to institute standardized methods of dealing with common hospitalized ailments. Where we are in the growth curve matters little. We grow. Little efforts may make the difference in the end. Individual efforts count. A single child went to school with the marshals in the 1960s. Lots of multifaceted actions preceded the single walk up the steps to first grade but we keep working with the same issues today.

The Internet itself is no longer new. Invented during the Cuban crisis time, promoted in the 1970's and made a lifestyle in the 1990's, some form of the Internet will continue to shape our lives. We may not now enjoy the latest wireless body mounted technologies, but we can connect. The Internet will shape how we practice and even think about our professions. The best experts in the world are available for consult by going to our computers. We must think about our practice in terms of teamwork even though we may still be the only professional within hundreds of miles. The rural library no longer consists of a few outdated texts but includes literature from around the world.

Online journals bring the best thinking to individual desktops. The online journal presents new standards for readers, editors, and authors. Readers must keep abreast of more literature than ever before. Authors must use more resources in their literature review, sort through fast developing theories and recognize their own bias before writing. Editors recognize that journals increase knowledge and discussion. Publication choices depend on elements of what makes a timely and important discussion as well as what makes a good scientific contribution. Online journal editors hope the potential discussion will reach the collaboration

level. Editors must ask will the discussion serve the readers, and empower them to reach their professional goals?

In this quarter's journal one of the founders of the Neuman Systems theory discusses how communities of providers can collaborate. Most rural providers have experienced barriers to collaboration. When disciplines work together as partners they can look out for each other's good, share ideas, and take credit for achievements (Sullivan, 1999). The Eighth International Neuman Systems Symposium will be held in Salt Lake City, Utah March 22-23. Visit <http://www3.telus.net/neuman> for further information. Does the Neuman System offer methods of overcoming the barriers in your community? The journal offers a chat room feature for your rebuttal. Readers must speak. The technology brought a new standard to our practice.

Another author states there is a need for different assessment tools for different populations. Such a statement demands feedback from readers about their experiences with similar assessment tools. The (n) is small and the sample taken from people before they enter and after they enter an intervention. This is typical of rural research (Center Nursing Press, 1997). Are the findings appropriate for your region? Since the tools are available, another community with similar concerns could reproduce the study and submit new findings on the same subject. Authors could compare and contrast two studies for a larger (n), or perhaps several communities could study the same subject and make one report of their findings. In this way both diversity of sample and the number involved are increased. This constitutes the collaboration editors hope result from online journals. The standard for research increases as small numbers no longer seem inevitable. Another result of larger samples could be increased attention in the media. The media rarely cites nursing, administrative, or rural based studies. (Center Nursing Press, 1997)

A third article describes the funding problems with Medicare for rural hospitals. The summary of the development of the prospective payment can help practitioners understand administration policies. This article calls for increased use of grants for new program development and telemedicine to expand outpatient services at lower prices. Is the article useful in your search for funding? Could you find new resources from other journal readers? Community collaboration makes one proposal eligible for larger grants. Should communities align themselves with educational and research facilities to get the funding they need? Or can small communities find the expertise they need in other small communities?

Paper based journals stop with the written word. The reader and speaker direct where the online journal moves next. Authors, editors and community chat rooms use the article to provide the foundation for discussion. Do the readers agree or disagree? Has someone written a report on the subjects they wish to share? The *RNOJHC* offers a place for group discussions. Your professional participation transforms the research into a seminar or conference-type question and answer session.

The journal may tap visionary leaders' ideas and give individuals with questions a larger platform of expression. Perhaps online journals will provide the catalyst to a new order of social interaction. Please help the journal overcome a major challenge. New journals lack previous readers. Venture an idea. Talk back to the authors. Submit your reasoned thoughts. With reader participation the *Online Journal of Rural Nursing and Health Care* will meet the needs for which it was developed. The journal can identify common needs, improve methods discussion, and increase research sample measurement. The journal results in increased professional knowledge, increased community collaboration, increased job satisfaction, increased local funding opportunities, and increased partnerships. As editors of the *RNOJHC* we

rejoice in the opportunities the new tool brings as we struggle with its challenges, and try to see its future. Today's journal is a small shadow of things to come. We hope we can always say we bring the best technology and increasingly higher standards to the challenge. The journal needs your participation. Contact the editors if you are interested in submitting articles, becoming a reviewer, or giving comment on the format.

References

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