

Editorial

Rural Nurse, the Consummate Generalist

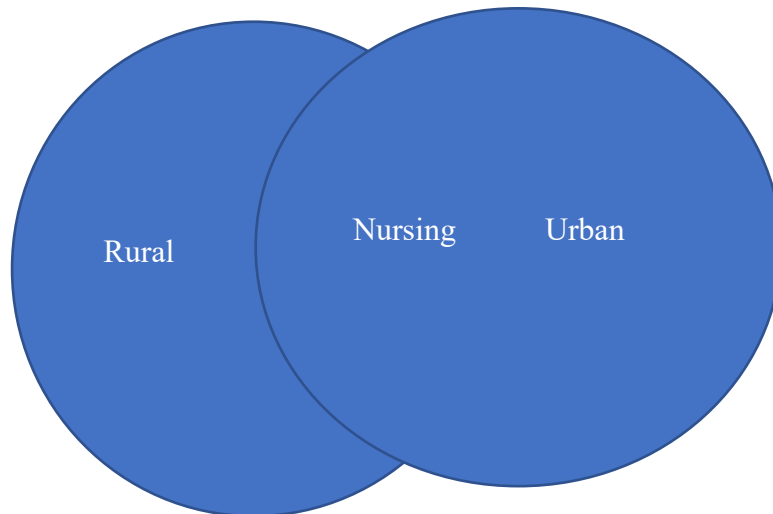
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If you are reading this editorial, you most likely know or want to know about rural nursing. In nursing education, a generalist usually refers to someone who has a nursing undergraduate degree, since they need to be educated about and have some clinical experience in multiple areas. Nursing advanced education usually focuses on various specialty areas. A rural nurse needs excellent generalist skills and knowledge, and their practice is such that they need breadth and depth of knowledge in multiple areas. A good deal of nursing is similar in different practice settings and with various populations (Bushy, 2012). However, it has long been argued that rural populations and their health care needs have unique practice demands. Thus, there are unique aspects of rural nursing (Bushy, 1998; Crook, 2004; Long & Wienert, 1989). Scharff notes, “The nature and scope of rural nursing is distinctive” (2022, p. 87).

My perspective has been informed by education, derived from practice in both rural and urban settings, as well as immersion in rural nursing literature. I see rural and urban nursing as a Venn diagram, although my ability to show this is limited. The intersection area is the discipline of nursing, where the knowledge needed is similar.

Figure 1

Intersection of Rural and Urban Nursing



On the Venn diagram, urban nursing is characterized by specialization, usually in one area at a time. Urban practice areas offer more external support for nurses to continue their advanced education and as they practice. Working or seeking education in a more specific area of nursing is often rewarded with better hours, shifts, or pay.

On the left is rural nursing; in my view, you need breadth and depth of knowledge in multiple areas and will be expected to be more independent and versatile, earlier. In any professional practice, it takes time and a period of transition to become comfortable and move to an expert level. The terms *newcomer* and *old/timer* are often used to describe acceptance into a rural community, but the same can be said of becoming a rural nurse. It may be harder to stay a rural nurse and seek advanced or specialty education due to factors such as distance, terrain, and a general lack of system resources or workforce to support time for an individual to gain more specialized knowledge. Scharff (2020, p. 100) says, “the newcomer practices nursing in a rural setting, unlike the old-timer who practices *rural* nursing”. Rural nursing rewards are often

intrinsic, with a sense of accomplishment and being prepared, in varying situations. A sense of community also develops from the interdependence of people and roles. Consummate, as an adjective, is to be highly skilled (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). In my view of nursing, I see the rural nurse as the consummate generalist.

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