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Caring for the Vulnerable

Perspectives in Nursing Theory, Practice, and Research

2nd Edition

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Dedication

To my sisters: Ruth, Wendy, Becky, and Sue
—MdC

To the truest of friends: Chris, Helen, Joyce, and Gary
—BA

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Foreword

The nursing profession faces many complex challenges in the next few years because we are increasingly providing care to high-risk individuals and groups. As we conceptualize how to frame this care and how our nursing practice will be designed and delivered, the theoretical and practical basis of nursing is shifting dramatically to meet these new societal needs. Mary de Chesnay and her colleagues make a significant contribution to our nursing efforts with the *Second Edition* of *Caring for the Vulnerable*. Traditional nursing roles and care settings are changing in response to the needs of increasingly diverse numbers of vulnerable groups. These changes have tremendous implications for the concepts, theories, ethics, and, ultimately, the practice of nursing.

Health disparities within our culturally diverse populations have become hot-button issues, and there seems to be no single silver bullet to help us address these growing health disparities. Of particular concern to all healthcare providers, as well as to politicians and others, is the growing number of what are termed *vulnerable populations*. This concern has triggered some political response as, finally, healthcare reform is being discussed at state and national levels, although it is not clear what outcomes or solutions will evolve. It is therefore most appropriate that this text focuses broadly on the key concepts of vulnerability and vulnerable populations but, in addition, extends our thinking to theoretical formulations that guide our practice. For example, the label of "vulnerability" can in and of itself be patronizing and, even worse, stigmatizing. Therefore it is important that nurses use the term *vulnerability* after a critical appraisal of how they conceptualize and provide care for both individuals and groups. Vulnerability occurs or is increased from a number of interacting forces and factors, and providing care to vulnerable populations without a clear understanding of the context in which vulnerability occurs is a prelude to disaster. This book sets the stage for understanding vulnerable populations and the context of vulnerability from the perspective of individuals, groups, communities, and populations.

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I believe most of us would agree that there are no theories of vulnerability, per se, but that there are many useful, albeit complex, concepts about vulnerability. Vulnerability has a global face, and I applaud the focus of this text on vulnerable populations at home and in international settings. Theoretical frameworks or theories (Watson, Rogers, and Leininger) that were originally developed for other purposes are now being applied to vulnerable populations. They add to our understanding of vulnerability within special groups and settings.

Vulnerability is not limited to issues of patient care because there are significant methodological issues in conducting research with vulnerable populations. Investigators who have worked with vulnerable populations acknowledge that many challenges arise when conducting studies with these populations. These challenges and issues do not arise strictly from methodological problems; they also arise from the theoretical and ethical implications that are inherent with vulnerable populations. Therefore the broadly based content of this textbook is of value to the profession as a whole as we attempt to identify and meet the needs of those vulnerable populations who experience particular health disparities.

This text also addresses practice and educational issues with vulnerable populations, addressing a new emphasis within nursing practice—evidence-based practice—as well as conceptual models for implementing care for communities. I believe there will come a time in nursing when we will move beyond individual patient care that is disease focused, ignoring the context in which care is provided. Instead, we will accept the community/public health challenge of meeting aggregate needs of high-risk and vulnerable groups wherever they are—at home, at work, or in acute care or other settings. This textbook provides an early and firm foundation for nurses who wish to explore the many aspects of vulnerability and the implications of that vulnerability for the care that is provided to clients.

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Preface

Caring for the vulnerable members of their society is a function nurses perform without regard for their own ambitions, personal safety, and financial security. They do this work from their desire to help the less fortunate and from their profound commitment to social justice, regardless of religious orientation. *Vulnerability* is a trendy concept, and *vulnerable populations* a term with specific meaning in the present political climate. Both terms are somewhat controversial in the way scholars think about people. Word fashions come and go, but there will always be those who are at risk and nurses will always define their role to care for them.

This book is the *Second Edition* of *Caring for the Vulnerable* and represents an attempt to introduce authors with a variety of unique perspectives. Based on feedback from the faculty and students who used the first edition, the editors have updated chapters from the first edition but have also included much new material to broaden scholarly discussions about vulnerability. With so many content areas that could have been included, the intent here is not to present a comprehensive treatment of the topic but rather to stimulate discussion.

Unit 1 presents key concepts that provide a basic structure for caring for the vulnerable. Unit 2 is an exploration of the relevance of nursing theories to vulnerable populations. In Unit 3, a general overview of issues relating to conducting research and reports of studies shows the kinds of phenomena nurses study and the methods they use to examine questions of interest. In the first edition all the research chapters were qualitative, so we expanded the types of studies for the second edition. Unit 4 consists of a variety of chapters that have practice applicability. A new Unit 5 was added to provide information on program planning. Unit 6 is about the process of learning to work with vulnerable populations and has a new focus on experiential learning, highlighted with a new chapter by Dr. Barbara Anderson, whose help as co-editor has been invaluable. Finally, Unit 7 focuses on policy.

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Originally intended as a primary text for undergraduate and graduate nursing courses on vulnerable populations, the book is also appropriate as a supplemental text for courses in community health, nurse practitioner curricula, nursing theory, research methods, and doctoral courses that emphasize vulnerable populations. We are told that the *First Edition* is widely used in Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) programs, so we included material on program planning.

Specifically included in the new edition are several short chapters that serve as samples of students' works. These are included in the book because students do not have access to the Instructor's Resources (found online at www.jbpub.com/nursing), and we thought students who use the book might benefit from examples. Finally, by representing the work of nurses in several countries, we hope that the book encourages interest in other cultures and might be appropriate for courses in international nursing.

We are impressed with the breadth of topics that could have been explored and regret that space limitations did not allow for including the work of even more nurse scholars with important things to say about vulnerability. However the book is used, we hope that readers will be inspired to think more about the vulnerable and to publish their ideas about how nurses can better serve people within our own communities, however we may define *community*.

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Acknowledgments

This book is a reflection of the talents of many people—first among them are the contributing authors. These talented scholars represent a small number of the many nurses around the world who practice and write about social justice. That social justice and care for the vulnerable is a universal phenomenon for nurses is reinforced when we attend professional meetings and when we travel to our own fieldwork sites and see social justice in action in some of the poorest communities of the world. It is inspiring to hear these authors speak and an honor to provide a forum for all who read this book to hear about their work.

Special acknowledgement is given to those students whose work is highlighted in the Instructor's Resources located at www.jbpub.com/nursing. The undergraduate students whose work is included thought carefully about the concepts in the book and care deeply for the people they serve: Christine Aquino, Danielle Berry, Tim Frederickson, Sarah Hillebrand, DoQuyen Huynh, Kate Jansen, Brittany Lyman, Sam Magnotto, Samantha Price, Dorothy Routt, Kerry Sjostedt, Sarah Sjosted, Martin Sullivan, Michael Tampieri, Angela Taylor, Heather Wehmeyer, and Josh Wymer. Megan Peterson did a great job writing slides for the Instructor's Resources.

There are technical support people who labor behind the scenes of any published work and without whose help, manuscripts would look amateurish. Jann Austin was particularly helpful in editing sections of the manuscript. Josh Wymer, Alona Habinsky, Heather Wehmeyer, Lisa Thorson, and Jennipher Jones assisted in preparing the Instructor's Resources and Kathryn Nardozza helped with the clerical side. Dr. Patrick Murphy, author and computer expert, performed miracles with models and figures. The editors and staff at Jones and Bartlett made sure the work was published in a timely manner. We are particularly grateful to Tricia Donnelly who cheerfully answered numerous questions along the way, to Kevin Sullivan and Amy Sibley for their help and encouragement early

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Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the editors would like to thank all of the vulnerable yet resilient people with whom we have worked during many years of clinical practice and education. Working in every corner of the world, the editors encountered time and time again, the strength of the human spirit and generosity of nature among people who have no reason to welcome strangers, yet who shared what they had and took the time to teach us about their cultures.