

NURSING STREAM EDITOR COMMENTARY

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KEY WORDS: commentary



Eileen Thomas currently teaches nursing courses at a fully online university and has taught online for over a decade, across all levels of nursing at several large public universities and private for-profit institutes of higher education. She is certified in online teaching by the Online Learning Consortium (formally the Sloan Consortium). Her interest in community health, global health, and qualitative research led her to develop and teach various online community health nursing, global health, nursing research and evidence-based practice, mixed research methods, and reflective practice courses for undergraduate and graduate nursing students. Thomas recently developed an online course that integrates an immersive virtual learning environment used to teach undergraduate students community health nursing concepts and a Florence Nightingale hall in a virtual museum that incorporates interactive quizzes, voice-over scripts, and entry into a virtual Crimean War and virtual Nightingale Training School for nurses. She has worked in a variety of acute care and community health settings, such as surgical intensive care, home health, hospice, and school nursing. She completed a pilot study that addressed men's knowledge and awareness of breast cancer in men, and for over a decade, her program of research focused on racial/ethnic diverse men and women's cancer screening behaviors. Her publications, including papers coauthored with undergraduate and graduate nursing students, and nurses from Iran and South Korea, are available in a variety of professional journals, including the *American Journal of Nursing*, *Journal of Nursing Administration*, *Journal of Community Health Nursing*, *Cancer Nursing*, *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, *The Qualitative Report*, and *Health Care for Women International*. Thomas has presented at national and international professional conferences and received several distinctions and awards, including the Chancellors' Diversity Recognition Award for Faculty Leadership, the Deans' Excellence in Teaching Award, and the Health Disparities Scholar Award from the National Institutes of Health Center on Minority Health and Health Disparities.

The *International Journal on Innovations in Online Education* editors are excited about the publication of this first issue. Each issue will include papers that address cutting-edge teaching strategies and innovations currently in use at institutes of higher education among online educators across a variety of professional disciplines. For those of you who may not be familiar with the term “stream” or “stream editor,” our editors-in-chief explain it as follows: The concept of a stream is based on the idea of a rapidly flowing stream of knowledge about an area in online education. Stream editors select streams based on insights to the field, observed need, and reader interest.

I would like to introduce myself as the stream editor for nursing. In this issue, you will find information on how an immersive virtual environment was incorporated into an undergraduate community health nursing course to teach students how to conduct a windshield survey and other community health concepts.

Without delving too deeply into what is meant by innovation, nurses—the largest group of health-care professionals—are known for their creativity and spirit of innovation. Changes in patient populations and student demographics have compelled online nurse educators to search for creative and innovative strategies that address the needs of their students. With the Institute of Medicine’s mandate to increase the number of bachelor-prepared nurses by 2020, more nontraditional students are returning to school. Today’s nursing students are typically working registered nurses for whom traditional methods of teaching may not meet their learning needs. Many nurses are enrolling in online programs that will allow the adult learner to seek a higher degree yet maintain their full-time working status. Innovation is central to the success of any endeavor and should be an integral part of institutes of higher education. Research has revealed that hospitals employing larger numbers of bachelor-prepared nurses have a decrease in mortality rates and improved patient outcomes. According to the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN), education enhances both clinical competency and patient care. Nurse educators have a responsibility to develop and implement innovative tools and strategies that will prepare a strong generation of nurses that can meet the challenging needs of our rapidly changing health-care system.

Health-care boundaries and shrinking geographical borders, global infectious diseases, and an increase in the number of refugees and immigrant populations requiring specialized, culturally appropriate care are just a few trends that are changing the practice role of nurses. This makes it essential for nurse educators to develop a spirit of innovation that will empower the next generation of nurses to become cutting-edge practitioners and leaders.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, innovation is the spark of insight that leads a person to investigate an issue or phenomenon. That insight is usually shaped by an observation of what appears to be an “aha moment” that results in a creative and surprising new idea. Innovation is driven by a commitment to excellence and continuous improvement and is often based on curiosity and a willingness to take risks and test assumptions. Innovation requires questioning and challenging the status quo, recognizing opportunity, and taking advantage when opportunity knocks. We invite you to join us by sharing your journey and the journeys of other educators who have challenged the status quo. In the world of education, innovation comes in many forms. There are innovations in the way education systems are organized and managed, innovations in

instructional techniques or delivery systems, and innovations in the way nurse educators prepare our future generation of professional nurses.