

Registered Nurse

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SUMMER
BOOK
REVIEW
SPECIAL

California Nurses
Association



Hospital prepared?
not

Is your home
Probably

CALIFORNIA
NURSES
ASSOCIATION

Summer

Book Review



On Duty: Power, Politics, and the History of Nursing in New Jersey By Frances Ward; Rutgers University Press

nce, and normative underpinnings of the profession? Modern-day advocates now include external shareholders concerned with the financial viability of their institutions. Ward believes this common perception that "a nurse is a nurse is a nurse" can be ameliorated by a clear delineation of position descriptions. Ward concludes with an optimistic example of how New Jersey nurses, again through legisla-

ter's and doctoral programs, Ward finds that the "deep wedge" driven between nurses and higher education has not fully dissolved. Ward

claims that this will facilitate if "a little time and effort is spent

on duty, power, politics, and the history of nursing in New Jersey, Frances Ward offers a comprehensive history of the professionalization of nursing from the days of physicians and nurses who first cared for patients in the 1880s, through the present day. With the history of nursing in New Jersey, Frances Ward offers a comprehensive history of the professionalization of nursing from the days of physicians and nurses who first cared for patients in the 1880s, through the present day. With

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Frances Ward

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Won't the cute resident just rush over and defibrillate me if I crash?

After establishing that, yes, media portrayals of registered nurses and nursing do matter, the authors next devote a chapter to examining each of the various stereotypes of RNs, tracing the origins of the stereotype and showing how the media perpetuates these negative images. These stereotypes include the nurse as random, unskilled helper, as handmaiden to the doctor, as sex object, as someone feminism left behind, as angel, and as bitter battle axe.

While the authors dissect depictions of nurses in all forms of media, they focus on the popular TV shows *ER*, *Grey's Anatomy*, *House*, and *Private Practice*. In these programs, physicians are routinely shown performing all the assessments and treatments of patients that in reality are actually handled by registered nurses. The authors call this "physician nursing." Even worse, when Hollywood does show nurses at work, it makes it appear as if RNs report to doctors, though we know that RNs are autonomous and legally have their own scope of practice, professional duties, and ethics.

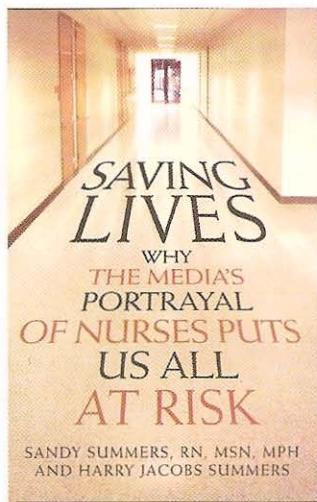
To combat these stereotypes, registered nurses need to be vigilant about promoting and protecting the right public image of themselves, argue the authors. Their suggestions include everything from encouraging RNs to call out bad actors in the media, to taking credit for life-saving work, to creating their own media. Some of the ideas are questionable, such as exhorting RNs to stop wearing scrubs with cartoon characters to project a more professional image. But their intention is in the right place.

The authors do mention CNA/NNOC in a couple of places as an organization that has bucked these conventional images of RNs through its campaigns, notably the 1995 effort to fight back California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's roll back of safe staffing ratios.

The book is organized well and flows easily, though it might help if readers were familiar with some of the television shows to which the authors often refer. Overall, *Saving Lives* is a nice addition to the available literature documenting depictions of registered nurses. —LUCIA HWANG

The Scalpel and the Soul: Encounters With Surgery, the Supernatural, and the Healing Power of Hope By Allan J. Hamilton, MD; Tarcher

THIS BOOK IS A fascinating account of stories collected by a neurosurgeon throughout his career about his most striking experiences with patients, healing, medicine, and death. Dr. Hamilton came to realize that there are aspects of life and medicine that cannot be explained



through simple science. Consequently, he felt that his role as a physician was to apply his medical skills while acknowledging and respecting the realm of the soul as an integral part of his medical practice. Hamilton's book provides captivating stories that push us to question what we know and believe about life and the process of death.

Hamilton applied and appreciated the scientific knowledge that is so critical to neurosurgery, but he had experiences early in his career that were too remarkable to ignore which led him to develop an understanding and respect for the non-physical components of medicine, healing, and death. Such experiences, ranging from the mundane to the paranormal, convinced the Harvard-educated neurosurgeon of the reality of a spiritual aspect to human life and healing. Whether by encounters with spirituality directly or through his patients, Hamilton came to adapt his practice to respect the unique needs and lives of his patients as they dealt with issues such as serious brain trauma and malignant brain tumors.

Hamilton did not start out as a follower of the spiritual or mystical world and was shocked to discover that he could perceive when a person was approaching death. Other experiences that led Hamilton to expand his understanding of consciousness were instances of patients who recounted specific events that occurred while under anesthesia and were completely lacking in measurable brain activity and patients who told of communications with deceased loved ones.

Hamilton was ultimately faced with a decision of whether or not to ignore this information and conform to the norms in his hospital and medical community or to attempt to understand how things could be possible and helpful to his practice. For example, how could Dr. Hamilton respect the needs of a patient to have candlelight while dying though the hospital prohibited open flames? In such circumstances, Hamilton finds solutions that support the needs of patients that would not otherwise be easily accommodated with an objective application of Western medicine and standard hospital policies.

Each patient's story brought to us by Hamilton reminds us that healing involves more than the objective application of scientific rules and that medicine must be adapted to the individual patient. Although Western medicine rests on a foundation of scientific knowledge, Hamilton realizes through his patients that his obligation as a healer requires a respect of the non-physical experiences of healing, life, and death. *The Scalpel and the Soul* leaves us with a renewed vision for modern medicine that does not reject, but instead embraces the spiritual lives of patients. —LISA TOSE

