

Introduction

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The delivery of healthcare in modern settings relies upon a wide and diverse number of professionals who are required to work together in a unified team in order to function at the highest level resulting in the delivery of top quality patient care. This focus is dependent on many supporting personnel from diverse groups whose role in this healthcare may not be direct, but nonetheless is important. Whilst there will always be specific knowledge, terminology and areas of expertise within all groups there is also often a great deal of overlap which provides grounding for effective communication. Nursing, like the other professions, has developed considerably over the past two centuries but the speed of change over the previous two decades has far outpaced preceding periods of advancement. This has largely been due to technological advancements, an emphasis on the production of evidence and the prominence of managerialism (with all that it entails). Thus, nursing is a fast-changing and dynamic profession that deals with a wealth of theories, models, hypotheses, views and beliefs, not only from within its own branch of healthcare but also from many others with whom they closely work. Therefore, it is vitally important that modern-day nurses not only keep abreast of these numerous concepts but also further develop their knowledge in these areas. This book brings together the top fifty *Key Concepts in Nursing* in an attempt to outline their basic framework, for both newcomers to nursing and those who wish to keep abreast of the developments in our profession.

CONCEPTS

Human development involves the use of language, which is understood as a system of communication based on rules that allow for the use of various combinations of symbols. One of the most important symbols in language is the term 'concept'. Concepts can be understood as abstractions

representing the reality of objects, properties of objects or particular phenomena. Thus, we can see that concepts become part of a particular group's framework of communication, known as their language, or sometimes as 'jargon'. They become known for their ability to formulate ideas within that group that employs a particular concept. For example, physicists use concepts such as 'black holes' and 'worm holes' in their language to produce known (to them) ideas about the universe. Thus, for physicists, these concepts are generalisable to other physicists. They are also not static but dynamic as the ideas involved in a concept grow, change, alter and develop in certain ways. Therefore, they may equally serve to create ambiguity and vagueness, and require constant refinement. This book attempts to dispel such uncertainty and bring, at least temporarily, a degree of clarity.

Concepts have a number of functions:

- Foundation stones of communication and thought – concepts transmit perceptions and information.
- Ways of perceiving empirical phenomena – concepts allow aspects of reality to have a common understanding.
- Means of classification and generalisation – concepts allow us to order, structure and categorise experiences and observations.
- Building blocks of theories, explanations and predictions – concepts are the critical components to larger-scale theories and need to be logically interrelated to be convincing.

This book is about nursing concepts as employed in modern-day health-care settings and which are part of our everyday professional language, much of which we share with our professional colleagues. They require careful consideration in order for them to produce the above functions, and will change over time as healthcare develops.

APPLICATION TO PRACTICE

An important element of the book is the grounding of the concepts within practice. It has to be stressed that key concepts are not purely theoretical constructs but are firmly embedded in, and driven by, practice. Nursing, as a practice-based profession, has long been required to demonstrate the application of theory to client care. Much has been written about the perceived theory-practice gap in nursing; this book aims to explicitly demonstrate this application of theory through the

use of case studies. The book examines the application of evidence and theories at different levels: macro, meso and micro. The macro level incorporates aspects such as political and organisational agendas and imperatives, while the meso level involves communities, groups and unit level organisation. The micro level addresses patient and client care alongside personal and professional elements essential to the individual.

Throughout this book, due emphasis is placed on weaving together the theoretical and practical elements of each concept, thus demonstrating the evidence base, values and drivers underpinning the nursing profession of today.

How to use this book

Nursing is an expansive profession which draws upon a range of disciplines such as public health, sociology and pharmacology, to name but a few. For students who are new to nursing, this multitude of concepts can appear to be a complex web, which is difficult to navigate. Although these anxieties are understandable, students can take comfort in the knowledge that nursing, like nature, has its own order, patterns and logical connections (perhaps not always apparent). The chapters in this book provide the reader with sufficient connections to execute a number of tasks depending upon what the objectives are.

The levels at which you utilise this book are dependent upon your own stage of study and what your task will be, whether it be preparing for an exam, assignment or for your own professional interest. The fifty key concepts in nursing are arranged in alphabetical order. Each concept can be cross-referenced to others to provide further linkages in the conceptual framework of nursing. Thus, the book can be used in two inter-related ways: first, laterally across the key concepts as cross-references and, second, hierarchically to provide a leverage into establishing depth to a particular topic (see Figure 1).

Below are some practical examples of how you may use this book. We have used the key concept of inequalities in health to illustrate how you may achieve this:

Example A You are required to write or discuss an overview of health inequalities. For this task the chapter on 'Inequalities in health' will be sufficient in providing you with a definition, key words and case history.

Example B You are asked to discuss health inequalities within the broad context of nursing theory and practice. For this example we suggest you refer to the chapter on 'Inequalities in health' and also use the cross-reference concepts. This will give you a detailed framework of analysis for your discussion of health inequalities within the context of nursing.

Example C Engaging with critical analysis of health inequalities. It is most likely you will not be expected to engage with critical analysis

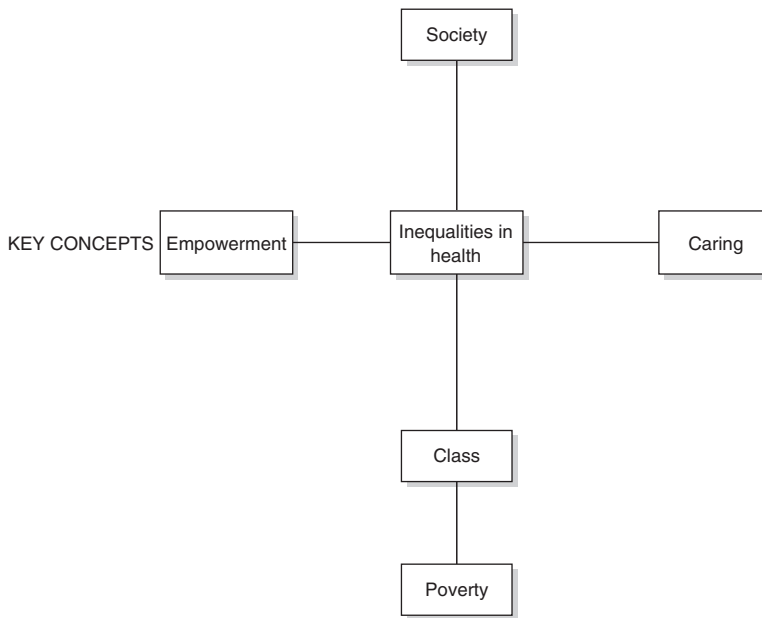


Figure 1 *Lateral and hierarchical uses of the book*

until you have progressed a considerable way into your nursing programme. However, when you arrive at this level of study, we suggest you incorporate the further reading sections of the chapters to examples A and B. Extending your reading and reviews of the related literature is an important component of any assignment requiring critical analysis.

Indeed, you may decide to read this book from beginning to end, and that will give you an overview of all the key concepts. You will also observe the varying perspectives, writing styles and interesting case studies from a wide range of academic and clinical nurses who are known for having made, and continue to make, an important contribution to the profession that they and you have chosen.

