Looking Back to What’s Ahead

The origin of the name for the month of January is Janus (n.d.), the Roman god of beginnings. The Romans dedicated the first of January to their God of Gates and Doors. Janus is usually depicted as having two faces, one looking back and the other forward. Doors have two sides, with people using them to enter or exit. Janus has inspired admonitions, encouraging individuals to know the past to appreciate or speculate about the future. We are often reminded to pay attention to history, lest we unwittingly repeat the same mistake or ignore lessons learned.

In the spirit of honoring Janus, this month’s editorial will present some history about the Journal of Psychosocial Nursing and Mental Health Services (JPN), and then speculate about the future. The focus will be fairly recent history (approximately 10 years).

PAST EDITORIALS

To select points from past editorials, the topics had to pass the test of “lesson learned” or “still relevant today.” And they had to pose questions, either explicitly or intended. The second part of the current editorial focuses on questions for the future.

In May 2004, my editorial was titled “Culture Counts…But How?” (Smoyak, 2004b). After a few paragraphs about the general debate on how culture could best be understood, I raised some questions (Smoyak, 2004b, p. 5): “For example, is ‘Asian American’ too broad? Are Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Filipino populations so diverse that one category cannot do justice to all?” Then: “Are ‘White’ and ‘Black’ truly meaningless today?” and “Should we always consider age, gender, education, occupation, rural/urban and immigration status?”

What about religion and political persuasion? Then, turning a bit silly, should we note the color of their eyes or hair, or being bald, fat? “It depends” is a frequent answer when questions of homogeneity or diversity are considered.

The November 2004 editorial, “The Construction of Reality or the Deconstruction of the Self” (Smoyak, 2004a), addressed the far-reaching new scope of the pharmaceutical industry and the main point was that psychiatric illnesses should not be treated by medications alone. The self is lost when the brain is treated as if it were only a medical reality. A similar debate is still ongoing today.

In October 2005, the title of the editorial was “You Are in Charge,” with the subtitle “From Defining ‘Reality’ to Generating Consensus, How We Understand the World Around Us” (Smoyak, 2005). I began by suggesting to readers that the “definition of the situation is the situation” (Smoyak, 2005, p. 8). We, ourselves, define reality and need to be clear about how we do this. What works and what does not when consensus is being generated are important to keep in mind.

In 2006, the “new normal” was the editorial’s focus, with 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina being the events that generated the questions and ideas (Smoyak, 2006). Today, with the many mass shootings, deaths, and terrorist activities here and abroad, the “new normal” has relevance.

In May 2009, the editorial’s title was a question: “What Do You Do All
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Day!” (Smoyak, 2009). Seven years later, nurses are still being asked to justify what we do. In today’s world, it is important to be articulate about what we do and convincing when the hiring process is at issue. Authors of recent articles have addressed how staffing is managed, and how the need for advanced practice nurses can be justified.

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The advent of the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) produced many discussions and articles in the scientific and lay literature, including an editorial titled “Change and the DSM-5” (Smoyak & Halter, 2013). The entire issue had a focus on the new diagnostic system. Changes in definitions, moving beyond “insanity,” controversy, and cultural awareness were included in the issue’s articles.

The July 2015 editorial, “Young and Old Have New Issues with Being Transgender” (Smoyak, 2015), anticipated some of the suggested questions in the next part of the current editorial. It ended with questions: “How much of this editorial is news for you?” “Was ‘transgender’ comfortably in your vocabulary, or have you added it?” (Smoyak, 2015, p. 5).

Having sampled part of JPN’s past, we can now close that door.

THE FUTURE

When we ask our readers what they would like to see in future issues, the most important item is having articles related to clinical practice. With that in mind, here are some questions for potential future authors.

What Should We Do?

Of course, the best response for any query is first another query. What specific patient problem concerns you? What is it that you do not know, and want to learn about more? What approaches have you tried so far? What role do you see for your immediate supervisor? In what way do you think higher level administra-

How Can We Avoid Institutional Policies Striving to Make Everything Electronic?

What, specifically, about electronic health records do you find objectionable? What suggestions do you have about avoiding the mechanistic, forced choice formats in many of the systems? What experience do you have with automatic prompts for medication management or keeping appointments? In what ways do you see electronic approaches diminishing individual responsibility and relying heavily on teams?

What Should We Do About Guns?

To which context are you referring—voting for laws about them, voting for candidates who choose to limit them or not, participating in the development of institutional policies about them? To which individuals are you referring—nurses who have permits to have hand guns, but not in full view; searching patients in emergency departments asking for help; visitors to an agency being searched; nurse students going to and from classes or clinical settings in dangerous neighborhoods?

How Much “Cultural Awareness” Can Any Nurse Have?

In a specific area where care is given or students are taught, what are the dominant ethnic/cultural groups? In what ways are nurse students different culturally from teachers? In what ways do language and the ability to communicate effectively influence how “culture” is viewed? To what degree do words such as “immigrant,” “asylum-seeker,” “second generation,” or “English as a second language” affect encounters?

The above major questions have actually appeared in manuscripts,
which we have recently received. Unfortunately, many of them have not been grappled with or answered because the manuscript has not been accepted for publication. Potential authors have not performed sufficient literature searches or held discussions with colleagues to expand their thinking about the issue being described.

BACK TO JANUS
Doors can be entries or exits. The past can inform the present. Lessons can be learned. January is a good time to develop the habit of asking questions while looking back and moving forward.
Happy New Year!

REFERENCES

Smoyak, S.A. (2005). You are in charge! From defining “reality” to generating consensus, how we understand the world around us. Journal of Psychosocial Nursing and Mental Health Services, 43(10), 8-9.