

# CHAPTER 1

## Contexts of Care

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The context of whom we provide care to matters. One might argue that the context of how, where, when, and why we provide care matters even more. Considering context is of paramount importance because the delivery of care first is influenced at the microsystem level and subsequently exerts an effect on the larger delivery system. To be complete, this discussion must also recognize that the macro system has an effect that filters to the microsystem. The sum of these forces and complexities manifests in our patient outcomes (Nelson, Batalden, & Godfrey, 2007) and, ultimately, perpetuates health policy as well as dictates future policy.

In this text, the complexities of our healthcare system and the forces that shape policy are illustrated through examples of personal stories that describe actual events. The stories capture the pressures and realities of wading through a complex healthcare system in the efforts to provide care and support professional nursing (Diers, 2002). The policies and regulations of our ever-changing healthcare system affect our ability to provide safe care within our individual ethical perspectives. And when we try to function in our organizational microsystems, encompassed by

macro system organizational culture, we are forced to consider the influence of those policies on our care. These stories are written so that you must uncover the incomplete or sometimes contradictory information that is available and analyze the “what ifs.” The authors ask what you would do if you were faced with these circumstances. What data would you need to collect? Who is the keeper of the data, or do the data even exist? What resources would you need? Who can provide those resources? How will you interface with the players? Are all of the necessary players at the table, and if not, how will you get them there? What would you like to see as the end result? Are there any adverse outcomes you would like to avoid, and if so, what quality improvement and/or safety initiatives can you implement to avoid them? There are no right or wrong answers.

In *Contexts of Care* you are asked to critically analyze the stories. The stories come with discussion questions. You are free to use them to guide your analysis or not. You are challenged to apply new theories and knowledge to events in a manner that generates solutions. As practitioners, we tend to focus on the how-to of providing competent care and seek a road map that includes detailed position descriptions for our role. Yet as advanced practice nurses, we cannot separate the practice issues from the policy issues. Everything we do on a daily basis is underpinned by current healthcare policy.

These stories provide you with an insider’s view of the context in which care is provided (Diers, 2002). From this view, you can summarize the various pressures and considerations that the story’s narrator faced. If you read between the lines, you will gain a better understanding of the importance of context. Through context we find order in the world and a sharpened perspective on reality, which in turn provide a backdrop for further development and refinement of our practice.

One note of caution: These stories take place at various times along the timeline of health care. The dates of the cases may be important to the understanding what options were available to the actors. Remember that it is not fair to criticize an institution, organization, or individual for not playing by rules that weren’t invented yet (Diers, 2002). Even if some cases seem “old,” they

were chosen purposefully to represent issues that, although the facts or regulations or politics may have changed, remain current (Diers, 2002).

The stories are meant to be discussed in groups—analyzed, debated, negotiated, strategized, and more. You are challenged to collaborate with others to resolve the issues presented in the stories, present alternative actions not taken by the actors in the stories, generate further questions, and provide evidence to support your conclusions. Health policy is made, changed, and implemented on several levels. These stories are a cross-match of policy issues that occur on the individual provider level, the organizational level, and the local, regional, and national levels. Analyzing and evaluating stories that occur in the context of time and politics are ideal ways to strategize and break apart options, solutions, and outcomes (Diers, Gustafson, Mahrenholz, & Price, 2002). Will you negotiate, argue, or attempt to convince your colleagues of your conclusions? The contexts of these stories serve as a reminder that health policy also has a context. How would these stories change, or not, in the context of today's healthcare environment?

## **How to Use This Text**

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For learning to occur with case method teaching, the learner must accept responsibility for learning and then share that learning with colleagues. Case method teaching is not just about reading a story and providing solutions derived from your personal experiences or assumptions. As with any endeavor, a thorough analysis involves gathering data, synthesizing data, and then applying data. The references and additional resources sections can be used as background or to tease out the context of the story. You will have to seek out additional information and evidence through readings or references to help you build the competency necessary to improve the health outcomes of your clients and the quality of your healthcare delivery system.

The backdrop for these stories is professional reports and standards for health care and nursing: the Institute of Medicine (IOM) reports (IOM, 1999, 2003a, 2003b, 2010), the Quality

and Safety Education for Nurses (QSEN) graduate competencies (QSEN Institute, n.d.), and the Essentials of Master's Education in Nursing (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2011). The stories are organized around the following themes: scope of practice, organizational and systems leadership, finance and regulatory environments, interprofessional collaboration, quality improvement and safety, professional ethics, evidence-based practice, clinical prevention and population health, and informatics.

Master's-educated healthcare professionals must be prepared as leaders with the ability to act critically within complex and ever-changing healthcare systems. We must advocate for our consumers, ourselves, and our profession to shape the future of our healthcare delivery system. We need to hold ourselves accountable for the quality of care delivered, the manner of care delivered, and the cost of care delivered.

You will find three basic chapter formats: in some chapters, the author has written text to introduce the subject matter and then concludes the chapter with a series of illustrative case studies; in other chapters, the author covers multiple subtopics, inserting illustrative case studies related to each topic throughout; and in the final format, the chapter is comprised of a single comprehensive case study. All chapters have multiple discussion questions inserted throughout to help you develop your thoughts in the following areas:

- Identify the problem and define the issue.
- Identify the stakeholders.
- Identify the risks and benefits to the stakeholders.
- Analyze the impact of the issue on the macro system, whether it is the organization or the larger healthcare system.
- Assemble your evidence—information/data that affect your beliefs about the case.
- Evaluate potential solutions to the issues.
- Construct a plan of action.
- Develop an analysis of potential outcomes.
- Evaluate the policy implications of your plan.

You can choose a format to present your analysis. Examples of the ways other learners have presented their analysis are as follows:

- A memo to an appropriate agency official
- A briefing paper to a senator
- A letter to the editor written from a particular point of view (e.g., CEO's, a regulatory agency's, an affected party's)

Nursing occurs within a context that inevitably influences both practice and policy. On the journey you experience through these stories, you will begin to understand how nursing's history has shaped trends and issues into contemporary practice and how nursing has come to value experience as data. It is my hope that you realize that how you choose to integrate your understandings into your own practice may ultimately determine nursing's future, as well as your own.

## References

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