

## The Clinic Shoe for Young Women in White

One of the many objects held within the Dolan collection at the University of Connecticut is an approximately 21 inch figure from the 1940s that depicts a young white woman in a white nurses uniform wearing white clinic shoes, and a blue cape around her with her right hand extended outward. Inscribed on the bottom of this figure are the words, “The Clinic Shoe- Registered U.S. Pat. Office & Canada- For Young Women in White.” On both the front and back of the figure is the name of the company that is advertising and selling the product, white clinic shoes, Olson’s of Grayling.



The molded, hollow figure is in good condition without much wear and tear, which is most likely attributed to the fact that it was well maintained for advertising purposes. The nurse in the figure is a young white woman dressed in a long sleeve white top along with a long white skirt that is just knee length. She has on a white cap along with a dark blue cape giving off an aura that conveys professionalism, modesty, respect, and more specifically authority. The main highlight and purpose of the figure is a shoe advertisement, and the nurse in the figure is wearing nice clean white shoes. The target consumer for the

product is a young white woman in the nursing profession in need of nursing shoes. Besides being just an advertisement for shoes it holds an implicit message of what is proper attire for nurses to wear as well as highlighting the fact that nursing is a profession for young women, thus excluding the old and men.

When thinking of the time in which this figure was made and the message that it was depicting, it is understandable as to why the target audience was young women. Women were preferred over men in the profession of nursing, and more specifically only women, “between 35 and 50 years old- anyone younger or older was automatically disqualified” (Houweling, 2004). Before the Reformation both men and women were allowed to partake in nursing work, but after the Reformation and Thirty Years’ War there was a disbanding of all men monasteries, thus causing a shift in nuns taking the responsibility for nursing work, which subsequently led to men in nursing not being accepted (A History of American Nursing, 2014). Because of this, the idea of not including men in the profession of nursing was held for a long time, and was not changed until much later.

So why did nurses in the 1940s choose the color white to represent the profession? In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the all white nursing uniform was correlated with conveying two messages, “it was identified with servants and it was considered to present a clean and professional image” (Fogle, 2014). Florence Nightingale, one of the main founders of nursing, was a major advocate for nurses’ uniforms to, “project soberness and respectability...modest,” and more importantly saw the uniform, “as a means of enhancing the image and the work of nursing” (Houweling, 2014). The nursing professions main purpose is to serve the community and the people in which they are taking care of while

maintaining a clean cut and professional image at all times. The all white uniform also, “symbolized and distinguished the nursing profession imparting both group pride and identity” (Houweling, 2004). Being in all white attire made it easier for nurses to be recognized because they were able to stand out from those around them.

Including a white shoe in the advertisement completes the whole theme of being clean cut and professional. Any other color could have been picked but the white was intentional to complete the theme of nursing during this time. The “Clinic Shoe” was also a fitted shoe, which is beneficial in the career of nursing. Nurses are on their feet for most of the day while performing patient care and the fitted shoe allows for greater comfort with being on ones feet for a long amount of time.

Looking at nursing attire in hospitals now, nurses are able to wear uniforms and clinical shoes of different colors, textures, patterns and prints that represent their individuality, thus allowing “wearers individual preference rather than standard professional image” (Fogle, 2014). Some hospitals enforce a certain color for all nurses to abide by to allow them to be more easily identified in their role. One major problem with nurses being able to wear what they want instead of a standard uniform for all is that it makes it more difficult to identify who the nurse is. Another change that has also occurred is that nurses now wear pants as opposed to the traditional skirt/dress. Along with this the physical therapist, respiratory therapist, occupational therapist and many other hospital staff have come to start wearing nursing scrubs as well, thus adding more to the confusion.

One may wonder why this major change in the representation of nurses? Due to the evolution of the whole profession of nursing, which now allows women and men of all ages, races, sexuality, etc. this has led to a transformation in the nursing uniform/attire. As the

profession of nursing has become more inclusive nurses are allowed to express their individuality in their work attire while always maintaining professionalism, and are now identified with their RN badges. Despite the major shift in attire, nursing as a profession still remains true to its original mantra of service and professionalism.

## References:

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