

Reflection of the UConn Nursing Uniform

One of the carefully preserved artifacts within the Dolan Collection are UConn School of Nursing uniforms that date back decades. The uniforms sport the classic white and blue theme of our university, but with the use of a different logo that sports a different design. The blue color of this past uniform is also a much lighter blue, as the university utilizes a much darker shade. These two artifacts are very different from today's uniforms, as we now use a white scrub top and navy blue pant combination.



The style of the two uniforms is made for a female student. The uniform is a dress that is cut above the knees, and bears the logo on the arm sleeve. Each uniform uses the secondary color on the sides to showcase the colors of the UConn. The design signifies the dominance of females in the field of nursing, as the uniform is a long, dress form of attire, which zips in the back much like many female dress of today. The uniforms have a heavy weight to them, likely from the thickness of the cotton used in manufacturing the material. There are no discernable detail to show who this uniform may have belonged to, but they are two very different sizes (S and XL), possibly belonging originally to two different students. The artifact's specificity for the

female occupant can be connected to the “symbols of oppression by a male and medical dominated culture” (Pearson, Baker, Walsh, & Fitzgerald, 2001).

Maintaining Modesty and Practicality

Considering the massive changes in attire from these artifacts to the current uniform, modesty and practicality has played major role in making that decision. Pearson et al. (2001) state that the “dress” uniform restricted their ability and movement when making lifts, but also prevent their dresses from riding up when they were performing everyday tasks. The two uniforms from the Dolan collection are a prime example in that the circumference of the bottom half of the dress is not that much wider than the upper portion. Therefore, the nursing students who wore these uniforms were at risk for their dress to “ride up” and had to perform lifts in a much more difficult fashion, having to “hitch” the dress end around the thighs (Pearson et al., 2001).



Identity of the Nurse

The identity behind these uniforms showed me a member of the healthcare team unique to the rest. As nurses in the past were given dresses to use within the facility of care, I feel it

made them very unique in terms of appearance. According to Richardson (1999), a study showed that ideologies about “identity” were at odds (p. 171). Richardson’s (1999) article tells readers how nurses felt the need to put on their special uniform in order to distinguish themselves as a nurse, to denote their status within the hospital or place of work (p. 172). Others felt that the uniform symbolized nursing as a whole, becoming a nurse only when they wore it, contrary to patient opinion that the uniform didn’t matter once a name and face were introduced (Richardson, 1999, p. 172). Pearson et al.’s (2001) article also emphasizes the notion that “the wearing of a uniform may increase the difficulty they have in identifying themselves” suggesting that some nurses worry too much about being professional on the outside. These overly focused nurses forget that the real development is within, building that self esteem that lets you give the best possible care to your patients. The first group sentiments are more in tune with the current mindset of nurses and students today. We are taught with the belief that our learning and practice is not applicable solely within the walls of the hospital, but how we view and practice health care in everyday life in the real world.



Relationships of Power

The nurse’s uniform can create a barrier between the patient or diffuse any clouds of confusion around the patient. According to Pearson et al. (2001), the patients are more likely to be involved in their self care and ask questions when the provider looks more like a regular person, rather than a professional. The uniform that the nurse wears cannot let the patient

become complacent in their own responsibilities. The importance for the nurse to foster a nurse patient relationship is heavily favored to nurture positive outcomes and maximize effective nursing care.



Significance

UConn's School of Nursing takes great pride in our uniforms of today and the past because it shows the advances and modernization that has continued over the years. Not only do both artifacts piece together what is now the unisex and combined color scheme of today's school uniform, it represents more than that. The uniform of the past shows the growth of practicality, modesty, the identity behind the uniform, and the power that comes with supporting patients to be successful together.

References

- Pearson, A., Baker, H., Walsh, K., & Fitzgerald, M. (2001). Contemporary nurses' uniforms—history and traditions. *Journal of Nursing Management*, 9(3), 147-152. Retrieved from <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1046/j.1365-2834.2001.00207.x/full>
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