

## FOREWORD

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*The Nurse-Herbalist* by Martha Libster is a revolutionary publication for the professional discipline of nursing. As an advanced practice nurse, herbalist and nurse historian, Libster asserts that the knowledgeable, skillful integration of plants for the purposes of health and healing is within the domain of nursing. She makes this claim from an historical analysis of the practice of western nursing in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the correspondence of nurse-herbalist practice within the articulated focus of the discipline, and a grounded understanding from her extensive experience of how to integrate herbs into a practice that is authentically nursing. Just as touch and dietary therapies are considered to be nursing modalities, so is the knowledgeable use of plants for self care, comfort and symptom management. This work calls us to re-claim a lost and abandoned legacy for the discipline and practice of nursing in the post-modern era. This will mean re-introducing plant therapies as nursing therapeutics through promoting the study of and experience with botanical remedies including engaging in a relationship with nature and plants. In contrast to the biomedical approach of prescribing or using herbs to fix health problems or cure disease, the nurse-herbalist partners with plants to promote healing within patterns of sleep and rest, mobility, pain, energy, emotions and thought, hormone balance and nutrition.

It is time for nurses to appreciate the patterned consciousness of plants and to be open to the gifts they offer. We don't use plants or herbs, we participate knowingly with them in repatterning the human-environment energy fields for health and healing. With about a third of the American public using some form of herbs for self care, it is essential for all nurses to understand more about the therapeutic value of plants.

This has been a missing piece for holistic nursing. Many nurses have considered herbalism “off limits”, within the realm of naturopathic practice. Generally nurses know very little about how people are using herbal remedies except to assess for drug-herb interactions. This book re-forms the way that plants are situated in nursing, giving us permission and encouragement to learn, grow and experiment with using herbs in creative ways.

This book is organized by weaving together threads of essential knowledge to create an epistemic tapestry for the practice of nurse herbalism. Seemingly unrelated threads such as nursing theories, tenets of Traditional Chinese Medicine, the healing traditions of the French Daughters of Charity and nurses in the Shaker and Mormon communities, foundations of primary health care, evidence-based practice and legal and regulatory issues in herbalism form this tapestry. Readers are guided in the preparation of self for practice as a nurse-herbalist. The five elements: earth, air, water, fire and ether provide a structure to present the preparatory material for a nurse-herbalist’s practice. For example, in *Entering the Earth Element* the reader learns to create sacred space for her practice as a nurse-herbalist and to create a practice plan. In *Awakening the Air Element* Libster addresses coming to know and understand plants through a variety of conceptual maps from evidence-based practice to traditional Chinese medicine. *Welcoming the Water Element* focuses on water and flow for delivering plant medicine. From hot water bottles to preparing teas, infusions, decoctions, soups, syrups, extracts, compresses, plasters, poultices, infused oils, salves and ointments, inhalations and steams, and baths, this chapter introduces us to these gentle, powerful caring-healing traditions that have until now been lost to nursing. In *Fanning the Fire Element* we learn about the regulations, statutes and guidelines in the practice of nurse-herbalism. *Effecting the Ether Element* focuses on our sacred relationship to Nature manifested with plants. This chapter includes a fascinating discussion of the alchemical process that occurs in making plant medicines where the consciousness of the maker and plant co-create transformation and healing. *Appendix A: The Nurse’s Herbal* gives “last but not least” new meaning; it includes a glossary and comprehensive compendium of remedies related to health patterns.

I am so grateful for this book. I know of no one else who could have written it. It is the work of a master who truly knows her subject matter. Libster possesses a stunning depth of knowledge, expertise and experience in both nursing and herbalism; with this she speaks confidently and credibly about the knowledge, competencies and Self formation needed for nurse herbalism. She is a nursing scholar who integrates 25 years of experience as an herbalist with a clear understanding of the scope of the discipline of nursing. In addition she brings a breadth of knowledge in traditional medical systems, counseling and consultation, and the political-legal environment surrounding herbal remedies.

The reader can look forward to being guided by a wise teacher who shares her knowledge and experience through personal stories and “integrative insights”, those realizations that have informed her practice over the years. The book contains experiments, experiential exercises that engage the reader in reflections and interactions on and with plants. This book is an absolutely essential volume for the library of all holistic nurses, and it is my hope that someday soon it will be required reading for all nurses.

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