

Nurses and Political Action

- ★ Politics is a means to an end, the end consisting of public policy
- ★ Political involvement leads to public policy formation
- ★ If nurses wish to affect outcomes in policy formation, they must be involved in politics
- ★ The term politics refers to the "exercise of influence"



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- ★ Influence can be exerted on:
- ★ the workplace by affecting the development of institutional policies,
- ★ the community through activities on local boards
- ★ professional organizations by participating on committees or serving as an officer, and
- ★ government through involvement in campaigns, letter writing, and voting



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- ★ Nurses hold a level of stature that is highly respected and trusted.
- ★ They are viewed as professionals who truly are interested in the welfare of others.
- ★ The role of nurses in health promotion is recognized by international, national, and state organizations.
- ★ Organized support of these issues can greatly affect world health, so nurses have a duty to investigate their role and increase their level of participation.
- ★ This type of empowerment broadens nursing's political focus and increases respect for the profession on all political levels.



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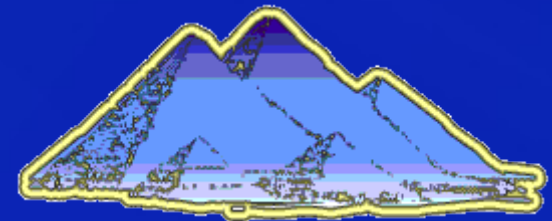
- ★ Nurses, as individuals, frequently do not address political issues that affect the profession.
- ★ A lack of knowledge of the legislative process causes them to be overwhelmed by the complexity of public policy.
- ★ Nurses focus on clinical care and sometimes ignore larger issues, partially due to a heavy workload, but also due to a lack of understanding of how to influence public policy.

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Public policy formation.

There are four main steps in the process of public policy formation:

- ★ setting an agenda
- ★ government response
- ★ policy design
- ★ and program implementation





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- ★ Timing is a crucial aspect in politics.
- ★ If a group of nurses want to introduce legislation supporting a higher nurse-to-patient ratio, the time to press forward on the issue might be after a negative outcome occurs related to a low level of professional nurses on staff.
- ★ Nurses need to recognize the factors that can potentiate change.
- ★ It always is wise to take a step back from the issue at hand and determine whether the time is right, or whether the cause might be better served by increasing resources and waiting for a more opportune moment.

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★ **POWER:** "that force that enables persons or groups to realize their will even against opposition." Nurses become empowered through education, leadership, and collective action. Power in nursing is based on four facets:

★ expertise and reputation

★ position or profession

★ personality

★ connections to influential people, such as major corporations, organizations, and politicians





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- ★ **Political-ethical conflict** = conflict between one's ethical belief system and what one feels compelled to do or is told to do by someone in a position of power. Many conflicts exist in the nursing profession, which are of concern because quality patient care and public health are at stake, e.g.
- ★ the difference between historical ideas of what nursing was and the new image of what nursing has become,
- ★ the contrast between the perceived weakness of the female gender and the strength of the nursing profession as a whole (eg, the largest single sector of the health care industry), and
- ★ the inconsistency between the goals of the physician and institutional sectors of the health care industry with goals of the nursing profession.



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- ★ Visionary leaders can bring nursing to the next level of professionalism and involvement.
- ★ nurses are in an ideal profession to articulate a higher vision of leadership.
- ★ If nurses can rid themselves of their traditional tunnel vision, they can participate in the promotion and election of visionary leaders.
- ★ Having visionary nursing leaders in strategic positions in health care facilities; professional organizations; and national offices significantly increases the influence of nurses and, therefore, their objectives in the health care political arena.

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- ★ WHO's key focus on policy development encompasses many nursing philosophies.



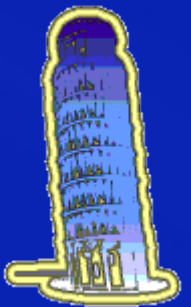
The organizations' policies for action include:

- ★ integrating health and human development into public policies
- ★ ensuring equitable access to health services
- ★ promoting and protecting health
- ★ preventing and controlling specific health problems

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Why TV?

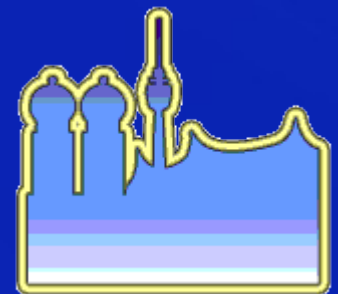
- It's where the people are. Most people have never read a "political" leaflet or attended a demonstration or rally - nor will they. The average adult Canadian watches 3 hours and 24 minutes of TV a day - a lot more time than is spent surfing the net, reading newspapers and magazines, or even listening to radio.



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Target politicians

- ★ Power is not evenly distributed in Parliament, or provincial legislatures. Target only those politicians who have the authority to make the change you want and then concentrate your resources on them -- including your ads.





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- ★ Nurse: "Let me get this straight."
- ★ Henderson: "The government's got money to bring in the Army to provide health care, but none for nurses?"
- ★ Nurse: "And they've got money to fly patients out of province, but none for nurses?"
- ★ Henderson: "Mr. Premier, in this next round of negotiations, offer nurses what you are prepared to pay the Army to provide health care."
- ★ Nurse: And for out of province health care too.
- ★ Henderson: Mr. Premier, offer nurses what they're worth."



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Politics and the Male-Female Sexual Dynamic

- ★ Politics in health care, as elsewhere, consists in exercising power, consolidating power, or effecting a change in power relationships - or put more crudely, working the system to advance one's interests.
- ★ In Canadian society, men have the positions of power and authority in public life. They also controlled the production of ideas, images, and symbols by which social relations are expressed and ordered

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- ★ **History:** The control of power was seen as requiring a high degree of rationality, objectivity, and stability, properties thought to be lacking or undesirable in females.
- ★ Based on the number of women elected to Canada's House of Commons to date, it has been estimated that it would take 842 years for women to achieve equal representation with men





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- ★ According to the **Socialization Paradigm**, the traditional division of masculine and feminine roles has deprived women of an adequate political education, undermined their motivation to become politically active, and encouraged them to devalue both themselves and other women.
- ★ the difficulties faced by women around issues of power and leadership are built into the **dramatically different division of labour** between men and women in most organizations.



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- ★ Kanter (1977) has identified three factors as critical in limiting the influence of women in decision-making and policy spheres:
- ★ blocked opportunities for advancement;
- ★ limited power to mobilize resources;
- ★ and the problem of tokenism whereby women are kept "in their place" in situations where men vastly outnumber them.



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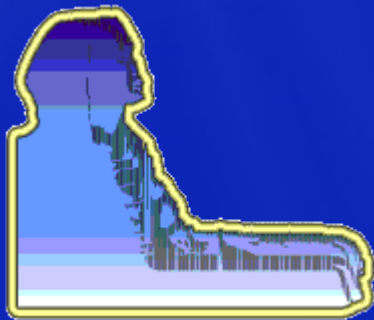
Blocked Opportunity

- ★ Kanter (1977) has found that in positions of blocked opportunity or little mobility, people - be they men or women - respond with various forms of disengagement such as depressed aspirations and self-image, lower commitment to work, and reduced feelings of competence.
- ★ Creates a vicious cycle: women tend to hold organizational positions offering limited opportunities for advancement and growth

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High-opportunity positions:

- ★ people have high aspirations and self-esteem, value their competence, and engage in various forms of active change-oriented behaviour.





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Powerlessness

- ★ Kanter contends that a similar interaction exists between the current distribution of men and women in the power structure of organizations and their leadership behaviour and political influence. As she notes, women have been handicapped by both their low-visibility, low-status positions in organizations and their limited access to the informal social networks, sponsors, and peer alliances which pervade organizational life.



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Tokenism

- ★ The third factor that Kanter believes is critical in limiting the influence of women in decision-making and policy spheres is tokenism, a problem occurring in situations where women typically find themselves alone or nearly alone in a peer group of men. Such "skewed" groups not only perceive the token woman in a stereotyped way, but they also pressure her to behave in conformity with that stereotype.

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Structural Constraints and Political Influence

- ★ From the structural perspective just elaborated, it may be inferred that the political influence of women is restrained not so much by their own lack of political consciousness and skills, but because of the greater power that has operated against them.



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- ★ Nursing in Canada appears to be making significant strides in at least one important aspect of interest-group politics, namely communicating and building relations with public decision-makers. In other words, nursing has been successful in gaining a measure of recognition as a key interest group in health care
- ★ But recognition does not necessarily mean effective influence



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- ★ Kanter's work suggests that it would be naive and politically hazardous to tackle the problem of sex-role stereotyping simply by attempting to bolster the persuasive powers of nurses or by cultivating a new public image of nursing. These strategies fiddle with effects rather than coming to grip with causes and so rationalize and maintain the existing power structure.



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- ★ Her analyses underscore the importance of structural approaches to helping nurses gain greater political influence. Specifically, there is a need for strategies which take account of the structural forces that support stereotyping: blocked opportunity, powerlessness, and tokenism.





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- ★ **Shared governance** represents an important means of democratizing the workplace and providing a more attractive work setting for professionally motivated nurses. It is also an important training mechanism for the development of decision-making and political-influence skills.
- ★ Is the creation of joint staff administrative groups who have responsibility for determining the policies and standards of nursing practice within an agency.

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- ★ **Flattening the Hierarchy** has the virtue of increasing the number of leadership positions and adding to the visibility and power component of jobs.
- ★ It also provides more persons with access to the power structure of an organization.
- ★ Great need for opening channels of communication and making system knowledge such as budget, salaries, and the minutes of certain meetings more routinely available for everyone.