

Journal of Evidence-based Nursing Practice

ISSN pending

Inaugural issue: Volume 1 (1) March 2020

EXPLANATORY BIOGRAPHY

Grace Wilson (1879-1957): exemplar nurse

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J Evidence-based Nurs Prac 2020: 1(1): 2-3

Introduction – the problem

Put yourself in our shoes. What do the principals of a relatively new publishing house and editor of a new nursing journal do to adorn the cover of their new venture, an academic nursing journal no less, in a way that gives readers a clue as to our purpose? This was the problem we faced when designing this, our second Journal, the Journal of Evidence-based Nursing Practice, stablemate to the Tasman Medical Journal. The problem is distinct from the reasons for commencing JEBNP, but these are described elsewhere in this inaugural issue.

The solution

Our solution was to grace our pages by featuring a nurse of some historical importance in each issue. Our nurses will have exemplified the notion of service to others. They will have made signal specific contribution to nursing care, and will have devoted their life to patients and the profession. They will easily pass any reasonable tests as an example to modern nurses, even though their dates speak of times long gone. We knew of Grace Wilson from

previous reading, and re-reading her history strengthened our opinion that this woman was the obvious choice as our inaugural exemplar nurse. Her history, which we only summarise here because more details of her life are readily available on-line,¹⁻³ speaks volumes of her service over decades. Born of Scottish stock in 1879, Grace Margaret Wilson entered nursing at the turn of the century at the age of 16 and qualified 3 years later. She trained further in London and became matron of Brisbane Hospital in 1914 – a rapid rise indeed through the ranks. She then joined the Australian Army at the same rank, and in 1915 was placed at Lemnos, where she improved the standards of the hospital and guided the treatment of the injured from Gallipoli. In our cover picture she stands proud and determined, sunshade folded in her arms, her hospital in the background having its first roofing iron put in place. Subsequently she served in Egypt, France and England.

Grace's active military career ended temporarily in 1920, but from 1925 she retained army connections as Matron-in-Chief of the Army Nursing Reserve. Her civilian

appointments in the interbellum years were as matron of the Children's Hospital, then at Somerset House (created by her) and from 1933 at the Alfred Hospital, all in Melbourne. She was called up in 1940 and returned to the Middle East but was invalided out in 1941.

Grace was a member and office-bearer for several Australian nursing organisations. In 1929 she was a recipient of the Florence Nightingale Medal, founded by the Red Cross in 1912. Grace died in early 1957, in the Repatriation General Hospital, Heidelberg, Melbourne, three years after her marriage to Robert Campbell. We refer you to the bibliography below for further details.

We salute the memory of Grace Wilson. She seems to us to be the ideal nurse to be honoured in our first edition. She will be followed in succeeding issues by other

exemplar nurses, and we hope that she and they will inspire our authors and their colleagues, and grace our pages with dignity.

Acknowledgement: We thank the Australian War Memorial for their ready assistance in approving replication of Grace Wilson's image.

References

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