

A bedside manner to transcend borders

BY ANNE SARZIN

A SYDNEY UNIVERSITY NURSING lecturer is the force behind an initiative of the Royal College of Nursing Australia to establish the nation's first trans-cultural nursing society.

According to its promoter, Ms Akram Omeri, trans-cultural nursing is the comparative study of cultures and their caring practices. It moves beyond ethnicity, examining issues relating to race, class, gender, religion, sexuality and age, identifying differences and similarities within cultures. "The goal is to provide culturally specific nursing care," Ms Omeri said.

Ms Omeri, an Iranian-born PhD student who also teaches at the Cumberland campus, has been a long-time proponent of trans-cultural nursing education in Australia. "Cultural knowledge eliminates stereotypes, discrimination, ethnocentrism and racism," she said. "It prevents patients' non-compliance, and cultural conflict between patients and nurses."

Ms Omeri believes that sensitivity to, and awareness of, different cultural backgrounds is no longer enough in a multicultural society's nursing system. "Trans-cultural nursing generates knowledge about cultural values, beliefs and practices specific to a culture, allowing better planned nursing care."

Macedonians and Iranians, for instance, are surrounded by family when ill and therefore a sympathetic nurse will not apply visiting hours rigidly. Poles often want to take religious objects into surgery, and staff should negotiate what is medically acceptable. Women from Asian and Middle Eastern cultures observe taboos associated with

childbirth—some demand that a baby be wrapped in several cloths to ward off evil spirits.

Last year, Ms Omeri wrote to the Royal College of Nursing, Australia, urging the establishment of a society to promote trans-cultural nursing education, research and practices within the Australian context.

The College welcomed the idea and asked Ms Omeri to identify objectives for the proposed society, and earlier this month, it held the inaugural national meeting of the Trans-cultural Nursing Society. "The College's

Australia, has asked Ms Omeri to write a document outlining trans-cultural nursing in a variety of settings in Australia.

Since her advocacy of trans-cultural nursing, the number of postgraduate research projects on the subject, conducted by students and staff in nursing faculty has increased significantly.

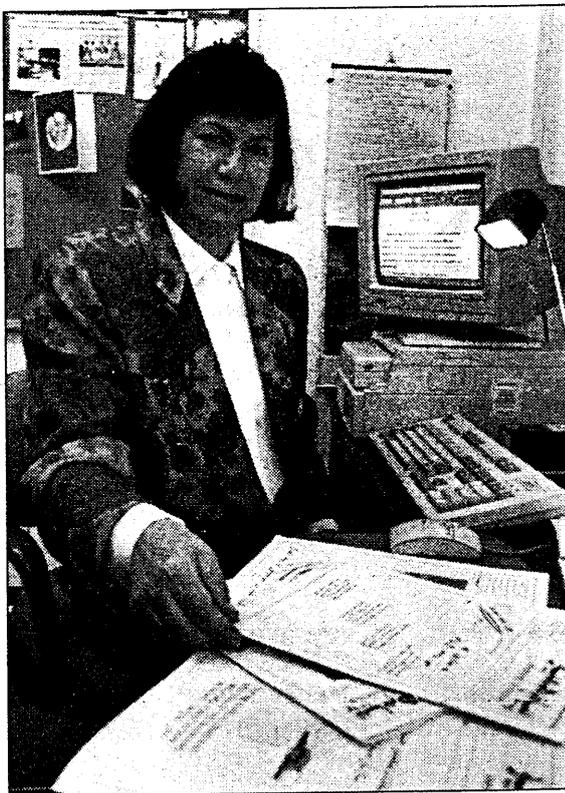
Although trans-cultural nursing is still in its infancy in Australia, it is part of a worldwide educational trend that had its major impetus in the United States. In Australia, the inclusion of cultural concepts in nursing curricula began in the 1980s but recognition of trans-cultural nursing as a formal area of study and practice has been slow.

"Global multicultural and migration trends demand urgent reform of nursing curricula. We must substitute trans-culturalism for the uncultural, biomedical philosophy currently shaping nursing education," Ms Omeri said. "Policies formulated by decision-makers still reflect an ideology in conflict with the many cultures encountered by nurses and health professionals in their daily practices."

During her years of clinical nursing, Ms Omeri became increasingly conscious of the lack of cultural

knowledge among health care professionals. "There was ignorance about cultural beliefs, values, practices and lifestyles. From a nursing perspective, I was interested in the cultural perceptions of nurses, who are the frontline practitioners in the health care area."

She developed a graduate course called Multiculturalism and Nursing. Ms Omeri hopes that this elective course in trans-cultural nursing will be offered in the Master of Nursing program in 1996.



Ms Akram Omeri: challenging cultural stereotypes in health care.

support was official recognition of the significance of trans-cultural nursing," Ms Omeri said.

The draft objectives of the Trans-cultural Nursing Society include: disseminating trans-cultural nursing knowledge to promote relevant, holistic nursing practices; creating a supportive climate for research and educational activities; promoting local and overseas contacts relating to trans-cultural nursing; and supporting positive initiatives in the field.

The Royal College of Nursing,