

How nurses bring clarity to the nature of social change

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Penn Nursing's Patricia D'Antonio, PhD, RN, FAAN, the Carol E. Ware Professor in Mental Health Nursing; Chair of the Department of Family and Community Health; Director of the Barbara Bates Center for the Study of the History of Nursing; and Senior Fellow at the Leonard Davis Institute of Health Economics. Credit: Penn Nursing

History provides an enhanced understanding of the factors that inform social policy. In the wider arena of public health and its influence on social change, the political and healing import of nursing cannot be ignored.

In an editorial published in *The American Journal of Public Health* titled "The Great Flu and After: Why the Nurses?" Penn Nursing's Patricia D'Antonio, Ph.D., RN, FAAN, the Carol E. Ware Professor in Mental Health Nursing; Chair of the Department of Family and Community Health; Director of the Barbara Bates Center for the Study of the History of Nursing; and Senior Fellow at the Leonard Davis Institute of Health Economics provides an historical perspective illustrating how nursing has influenced the cultural and social dimensions of public health policies and practices.

In the editorial, D'Antonio broadens the impact of an article in the same issue about how the role of Black American nurses during the 1918—1919 influenza pandemic incrementally advanced civil rights and provided some [greater opportunities](#) for Black nurses overall.

D'Antonio suggests that the history of nurses and nursing can move beyond just important events and actors; it can help provide answers to questions about how agendas around change in public health policy and practice might also change attitudes and beliefs; how self-interest or group interest may intersect with broader issues of social justice; and if harm reduction policies are appropriate steps when ultimate goals are for broad-based prevention.

"We can see the illustrative power of how this group of clinicians, and the discipline they represent, allow us to more fully understand the nature of social and political change," said D'Antonio. "Through historical analysis like this, we can see how [nurse](#) have used opportunities when there were increased demands for their care to

challenge their marginalization or exclusions from larger issues of policy or practice."

More information: Patricia D'Antonio, *The Great Flu and After: Why the Nurses?*, *American Journal of Public Health* (2019). [DOI: 10.2105/AJPH.2019.305093](https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2019.305093)

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