

Public Policy and Canadian Nursing: Lessons from the Field

By Michael J. Villeneuve

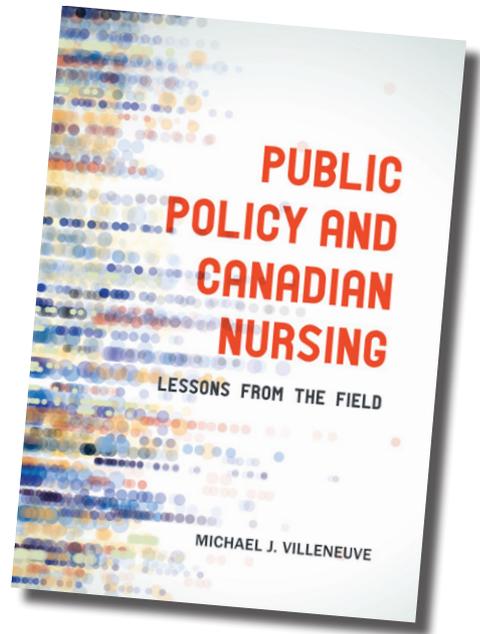
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The recently released book *Public Policy and Canadian Nursing: Lessons from the Field*, by Michael J. Villeneuve, has been described as a “must read” by Gail Donner, professor emerita, Faculty of Nursing, University of Toronto, and by Kathleen Macmillan, professor and director of the School of Nursing at Dalhousie University. That is an excellent recommendation from two well-respected Canadian nurse leaders.

For our review, we approached the book as nurses who hold senior policy positions in the province of British Columbia and have been in these roles for the past four years and 18 months, respectively. Why is this context important? Our perspective is grounded in practice and the value nurses, from strong practice “roots,” play in translating care delivery to effective public policy. Villeneuve quotes Judith Shamian, former president of the International Council of Nurses, as saying “None of the rules are clear and nothing we do out there in clinical care applies to what we do in here.” However, we suggest that the binary nature of that statement is somewhat misleading. Just as there is a culture of “how things are done” in every clinical setting across the continuum of care, there are also “rules” within a culture of government(s). The skill is in deciphering the rules and leveraging nursing knowledge, skills and abilities to maximize the influence on the policies that result from the mandate(s) of government.



This book is particularly instructive in both the “what and how” of policy work and of the importance of credible evidence in policy development. It is a DIY guide to how nurses can advocate directly and indirectly in political processes to influence all levels of government. Villeneuve points out accurately that nurses must first understand how “things work here” as the creation of public policy is not as random as professionals outside of government imagine. There is a rhythm and pattern to how policy is identified, developed and moved forward. Understanding these patterns is critical for every nurse in order to apply and align their energies to influence policy. The book provides a roadmap for individual nurses and nursing collectives who are interested in advancing particular agendas. He points out that time and timing must be taken into consideration and that there is a place for both short and long term strategies.

Villeneuve artfully and pragmatically introduces health policy, Canadian policy structures and governance. He weaves these elements together within a Canadian public health and nursing context to form a connected tapestry of health policy decision-making. His lessons from the field should be required reading for nurses across the country who are interested in understanding the importance of evidence, power and politics in creating public policy. The ease of reading and the modular nature of the content leads the reader from the macro to the micro, and takes what could be considered a topic of limited interest to one of significant importance to practicing nurses.

This book challenges nurses at all levels, from students to senior leaders, and in all domains of practice to step up knowledgeably and apply these collected insights to ensure that the knowledge and expertise of nurses and nursing is reflected in policy. Villeneuve points out, and these authors concur, that this will only occur if nurses understand and can navigate the practice setting of government(s).



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