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GUEST EDITORIAL

A giant of practice development

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In this edition, there are three contributions from a nurse who is recognised as something of a giant within the international practice development community. In recent times, however, the achievements of Professor Brendan McCormack have been publicly and professionally recognised, honoured and celebrated, way beyond our community of practice.

This year, Brendan was awarded Fellowship of the Royal College of Nursing of the United Kingdom, the highest award the college can bestow. Fellowship is given to those who have made an exceptional contribution to nursing or healthcare, whether through clinical innovation, leadership, research or practice development.

Brendan has, without question, made an exceptional contribution to practice development. However, we would argue that he has made equally valuable contributions to clinical innovation, leadership and research.

In 2011, the University of Ulster awarded Brendan the status of Senior Distinguished Research Fellow. Brendan's contribution to research has also recently been acknowledged on the international stage and publicly celebrated in Scotland, where he is now based. On 14th September 2014, a *Glasgow Herald* headline read 'Nursing professor is named among elite'. The article cited Brendan as the first European to be inducted into the International Nurse Researcher Hall of Fame. This is recognition from Sigma Theta Tau International, an organisation that promotes global excellence in nursing leadership.

We think Brendan is exceptional because he has skilfully pushed the boundaries of knowledge while remaining firmly grounded in nursing practice. And while that might be what you would expect from a nursing scholar, we think Brendan has demonstrated extraordinary vision, conviction and tenacity. Why do we think that?

'Nursing research has come of age', said a headline in *The Guardian* in the wake of the 2008 assessment of research quality in UK universities (Higher Education Funding Council for England et al., 2008). That was incredibly encouraging. Collectively, those actively engaged in research into the concerns of nursing practice were starting to have an impact, which was clearly good for nursing as a profession and potentially good for patient care and public health. We say 'potentially' because, until recently, research quality has essentially been assessed according to research income (money) and research output (publications), and success on these terms has had a habit of breeding success. Brendan has clearly excelled in this regard.

This way of measuring the quality of research has worked well according to conventional wisdom, with the business of generating new knowledge being the domain of the research community and the business of using and applying that knowledge sitting squarely on the shoulders of those 'in practice', whether they be policymakers, managers or people 'on the shop floor'. However, such metrics were unsatisfactory to those of us who regard research and practice as inextricably linked. We would argue that such a system paradoxically served as a disincentive to the meaningful engagement in practice development of scholars pursuing a research career. Therefore, the ability to sustain these two agendas and excel in both, as Brendan has, is quite extraordinary.

Recently, however, the UK government has broadened the definition of 'impact' when it comes to the assessment of university research. The generation of new knowledge is no longer regarded as an end in itself and scholars are required to demonstrate the impact of their research on the economy and society. Perhaps it is those for whom practice has always been the primary focus and developing practice their *raison d'être* – the very people who contribute to this journal – whose time has now come.

Through his innovative research, facilitation and teaching, Brendan McCormack's reach is global and his impact transformative. The 2011 Royal College of Nursing Research Society Winifred Raphael memorial lecture (McCormack, 2011), exquisitely demonstrated Brendan's skilful integration of research, leadership, clinical innovation and practice development. If you weren't there or haven't yet watched the recording of the lecture, we commend it to you. Brendan McCormack is inspiring a generation of nurses.

We also celebrate Brendan's recent move to Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh for many reasons, not least his humanity and humility, and the immense personal qualities that allow him to form relationships and exert influence across policy, service and academic sectors. However, it is his advocacy of quality, of professionalism and of person-centred practice that resonates so much with the culture here in Scotland, with our ambition to have a world class healthcare system with world class nursing, underpinned by research and practice development.

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