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# Professor Katie Eriksson – the loss of a pioneer in caring science

In this guest editorial, we acknowledge the contributions of one of the great pioneers of caring science in the Nordic countries, professor emerita Katie Eriksson. Fifty years of devotion to the development and refinement of caring science ended on 30 August 2019 when professor Eriksson passed away in Helsinki, Finland.

Born in Jakobstad, Finland, on 18 November 1943, professor Eriksson's career in nursing began at the Helsinki Swedish School of Nursing where she became a nurse in 1965 and a public health nurse in 1967. Following graduation from the nursing teacher education programme at the Helsinki Finnish School of Nursing in 1970, she continued her academic studies at the University of Helsinki, receiving a Master's in philosophy in 1974, a Licentiate in 1976 and a Doctorate in pedagogy in 1982.

She was awarded the first docentship in caring science in the Nordic countries ever when she was appointed docent of Caring Science at the University of Kuopio in 1984. In 2001, she became docent at the Faculty of Medicine, University of Helsinki.

She was appointed dean at Helsinki Swedish School of Nursing in 1974, a position she held until 1986, when she was called to plan an education and research programme in caring science at Åbo Akademi University in Vaasa. Her planning resulted in the establishment of the Department of Caring Science, Åbo Akademi University, which still today offers Master's and Doctoral degrees in caring science. She was appointed Professor of Caring Science at Åbo Akademi University in 1992 and subsequently continued the further development of her theory of caring and caring science as an academic discipline. Under professor Eriksson's leadership, the department acquired a leading position in caring science in the Nordic countries, attracting students and researchers from throughout the Nordic region.

Professor Eriksson was also engaged at the Faculty of Medicine, University of Helsinki, where she held a professorship in caring science between 1993 and 1999. In 1996, in connection with her professorship at Åbo Akademi University, she was made responsible for the research and development of caring science as Director of Nursing at Helsinki University Central Hospital.

Teaching and research were professor Eriksson's primary work foci. Her systematic development of caring science started in the 1970s, partly through the development of an ideal model of caring that formed the basis for her caritative caring theory, and partly through the development of caring science as an independent, humanistically oriented discipline. Professor Eriksson did not view caring science as being intertwined with the nursing profession, but instead promoted it as being professionally

neutral and applicable to all professions characterised by relational work: doctors, social workers, teachers, psychologists and theologians. Professor Eriksson's interest always revolved around the basic issues of caring and an inward search for the core and ethos of caring. She saw *caritas* as the basic motive of caring, and the alleviation of suffering and the serving life and health as the ultimate goal of caring. Her theory of suffering illuminated many new aspects of the meaning of suffering, the drama of suffering and how suffering can be alleviated. For many in clinical nursing care, professor Eriksson's discovery of three kinds of suffering – suffering of illness, suffering of care and suffering of life – has been eye-opening.

Basic research has clearly been the main focus of professor Eriksson's labours. In developing both the substance and the discipline of caring science, professor Eriksson found inspiration in the Greek classics: Plato, Socrates and Aristotle. Peep Koort, mentor and supervisor of her PhD, influenced her scientific approach and research in many ways. The model for systematic concept analysis that she developed was based on Koort's methodology. Her development of caring science was characterised by a strong belief in the meaning of concepts and language. She considered ontology to be more important than epistemological and methodological issues. Her view on knowledge formation was that it starts from the belief that ethics precedes ontology. This entails that human holiness and dignity pervade the process of research and search for knowledge. Thus, in theory as well as in practice, ethics precedes ontology.

Professor Eriksson was a frequent lecturer, inspiring not only practicing nurses but all academic levels. Her lectures were dynamic and inspirational, and the expressive pictures she drew during her lectures are unforgettable. She also acted as a highly sought-after opponent for numerous doctoral dissertations in the Nordic countries. Professor Eriksson's ideas and theory have greatly influenced researchers at universities, in higher education and in clinical practice, especially in the Nordic countries. Her work is also frequently cited in publications from all academic levels. Her goal-oriented efforts to develop a new healthcare discipline were reflected in all of her educational planning and teaching and in her research focus.

Professor Eriksson was extremely devoted to her work and was a very productive researcher and author. Starting in the 1970s, her scientific production is extensive and varied, including over 400 titles: textbooks, scientific reports, professional articles in international journals and short papers. Some of her titles have been translated into other languages, mainly Finnish and other Nordic languages, but even English, German and Braille. A great

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honour and a significant international recognition of her work in caring science was bestowed on her when in 2005 she received her own chapter in the encyclopedia of nursing theorists (1). Her last book, *Vårdvetenskap. Vetenskapen om vårdande. Om det tidlösa i tiden [Caring Science. The Science of Care. About the Timeless In Time]* (2008) (2), is a compilation of the core thoughts in her most influential books. In this tome, she reveals that her intention was to create a theory that was unencumbered by time, a theory capable of uniting past and present in a timeless presence and through which the eternal was expressed: the innermost core of caring.

For her professional and academic accomplishments in caring science, professor Eriksson has received many awards and honorary degrees. Among others, in 1987 she was awarded the Sophie Mannerheim Medal in gold by the Swedish Nursing Association in Finland; in 2003 the Topelius Medal, instituted by Åbo Akademi University, for excellent research. She held Nordic co-operation in high regard and was awarded an Honorary Doctorate in Public Health by the Nordic School of Public Health in Gothenburg, Sweden in 1998. In 2003, Eriksson was also nationally honoured by being awarded the Order of the White Rose of Finland, Knight, First Class. She was also appointed honorary member of the Nordic College of Caring Science in 2012 and was awarded a second Honorary Doctorate by Karlstad University, Sweden, in 2013.

## References

1 Lindström UÅ, Nyström LL, Zetterlund JE. Katie Eriksson: Theory of caritative caring. In *Nursing theorists*

and their work, 8th edn. (Alligood MR ed), 2014, Elsevier/Mosby, St. Louis, 171–201.

2 Eriksson K. *Vårdvetenskap. Vetenskapen om vårdande. Om det tidlösa i tiden [Caring*

In many respects ahead of her time, Professor Eriksson will be remembered for years to come. Her works present a visionary view of knowledge development, education and contemporary nursing practice. Her thoughts have advanced our profession and enhanced our ability to care for those in need while preserving their dignity. Her legacy of thoughts and words on caring has paved the way for research to come, and her memory will be kept alive in the minds of all the students and faculty who apply her theories when providing care. It was a privilege to know and work with professor emerita Katie Eriksson and to have been given the opportunity to study under her as scholars and doctoral students. We remember her and her life's work with gratitude. May she rest in peace.

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