



LETTERS

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PRIMARY VS. SECONDARY SOURCES

Even as a nursing student at Hunter College in New York City, I was instructed to go back no more than five years in literature searches, except when using classic citations. The belief that new is better is often true in science, but the new must build on the old.

I'm reminded of Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*—there's no need to burn old books if we're only allowed to look back into the literature for five years.

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Diana Mason's four key statements were so poignant,

as nursing doesn't often meet the standards of other established sciences. I've been teaching research in nursing schools for more than 20 years. First and foremost, there is a lack of attention paid to the credibility of the author. Even textbooks use secondary sources.

I was especially pleased with Mason's comment about searches—that is, the need to make full searches into the past to locate, if nothing else, the original text on the topic. I require that our graduate students study such history tracing in our thesis program. It's an area of study that seems to be losing ground in

nursing. There's less respect for history and the patterns that emerge with such research. To limit a search to a number of years or a specific journal reduces the potential to locate germane information.

Some of us are stressing the importance of evidence-based practice for the neophytes now entering the profession. Such scholarship will be essential to all—practitioners, educators, administrators, consultants, entrepreneurs. Practice can no longer be undergirded by tradition.

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