

Emerging Health Policy Research Conference Abstract

Author: Ruth Townsend

Title: 'Moral imperative or economic necessity – politics, philosophy and public health law.'

Keywords: public health, law, economics, history, philosophy

Abstract: The cycle of individual versus collective interests in health and health care delivery continues today with governmental shifts in political ideology often dictating the approach. The first public health laws were developed in England in 1848. These same laws were then applied in their entirety to the Australian colonies. Yet despite the advancement in the education of health professionals, medical technology and pharmacology, our public health laws have changed little. Questions as to why the legislation was adopted initially, that go beyond the actual need to develop sanitation systems and maintain clean water sources, that examines the values that drove the application of the legislation, have not been asked in the Australian context. Was the first legislation the product of contemporary (19th century) political philosophy? If so, what was that philosophy and do we as a society hold those same values now? Why are we maintaining the status quo? What is the one thing that hasn't changed and why is this significant? A retrospective textual analysis of parliamentary debates surrounding the introduction of the legislation along with an insight into the social conditions of the time provided via newspapers and other historical documents, helps answer these questions.

Biography: I have worked as a registered nurse, paramedic and solicitor before becoming a lecturer, teaching nurses and paramedics about law and ethics. I am currently enrolled as a PhD candidate at the School of Law at Flinders University pursuing my interest in public health policy.

Ruth Townsend
BN LLB LLM GradDipLegalPrac GradCertVET DipParaSc
Lecturer in Law and Ethics
School of Nursing and Midwifery
Charles Sturt University
Bathurst NSW 2795
Email: rtownsend@csu.edu.au
Phone: 63 384 511
PhD candidate: Flinders University Law School