

Brooks, F., Macintyre M. and Scott, P. Exploring the impact of a digital discourse system: a means to make women's health work more visible. *Proceedings of the 3rd International Women Work and Computerisation Conference. Vancouver, Canada, June 2000.*

Abstract:

Female dominated health professions such as nursing and midwifery have long occupied subordinate positions within health care systems. The gendered medical division of labour has resulted in the marginalisation and devaluing of the, skills and competencies associated with such *women's work*. The development of health informatics can be seen to have reinforced a marginalised position for female dominated health professions. While medical informatics has become an established discipline supporting medicine, professions such as nursing experienced the imposition of information systems that have been inappropriately focused on financial management. Systems, that failed to respond to nursings' need for improved clinical effectiveness and enhanced communication.

This paper reports on an on-going project that has set out to explore the impact of computer-mediated communication (CMC) on nurses; access to information, communication patterns, clinical practice and input into the decision-making process. The first stage of the project considered the actual usage and content of email as well attitudes toward CMC in an acute hospital setting. The aim was to assess the knowledge and motivation towards the use of new information and communication technologies. The second stage will over two years seek to pilot the use of a digital discourse system that will enables health professionals in the Trust to further access and contribute to threaded, asynchronous discussions and themed information.

The presentation will highlight the ways in which the use of CMC in phase one of the project was found to have impacted positively on nursing culture and promoted the visibility of nursing knowledge through the discursive sharing of experiences. The discussion will then seek to explore with conference participants ways to refine the investigation, to enable consideration of the impact of gendered knowledge and expertise on the design, implementation and impact of the pilot digital discourse system.