

# Keeping Her Condition Stable: A Historical Analysis of Advertising to New Zealand Nurses in the Kai Tiaki Magazine 1908- 1929

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## Introduction

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century advertising was advancing rapidly in its production capability, quality of images and knowledge of how to talk about products (Pollay, 1985). Within the mass media of the day, magazines played a significant role. Pollay (1985) describes old magazines as a “fascinating window of our social history where advertising displays behaviors, styles and roles for objects” (pg 24). As a form of print media, trade magazines and journals were a valuable means of disseminating specialized up-to-date information to workers on matters such as current industry practices, regulations, and impending changes. Trade communications also provided advertisers direct access to target markets, as they drew together a network of like-minded and involved audiences. At the same time, advertising was an important means of providing revenue for fledgling association journals anxious to off-set costs of production and circulation not able to be met entirely by member subscriptions.

The editorial content of early trade journals provides valuable material for researchers studying the historical aspects of an organisation or industry and how its culture, values and practice were shaped. However, so too does the advertising placed in these journals; both as a complement to the articles that record and discuss events or ideas of the day, and as a stand-alone window of insight. Advertising has long been credited as a socialization agent in its ability to transmit cultural values either embodied within the product or that may be realized by consumption of the product itself (Belk and Pollay, 1985; Brooker and Thacker, 2012; Fangman et al, 2004; Sivulka, 2008). Historical analysis and reflection on the goods and services chosen to be advertised to a group of workers adds value for two reasons. First, much can be learnt about the consumption needs and organization of services a particular group engaged in. Second, and more generally, the study of historical advertising within a particular context- here early 20<sup>th</sup> century trade journals- adds to the body of knowledge regarding early advertising strategy within society and the marketing systems they supported.

This study investigates advertising placed in the ‘Kai Tiaki’ journal (the first and at the time sole New Zealand (NZ) nurses’ journal) in the early part of the 20th century; a chronological timeline that parallels the increased rise in sophistication of print advertising and developments within an emergent qualified nursing service. Based on the Nightingale model of nursing, and although comparatively small in numbers, NZ nursing either led or kept pace with developments in nursing worldwide, being the first country to obtain registration for its nurses in 1901 in a dedicated Act of Parliament (Wood and Arcus, 2011). Although the nursing system faced challenges that the country’s geographical isolation and small population base brought with it (such as ready access to supplies), it represents an emergent yet progressive provider market and one that was also establishing itself as a legitimate force in the international nursing network of the day (O’Connor, 2010).

The study fills an important gap in the literature and contributes by offering critique of both how communication through advertising targeted health professionals at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and how the nursing industry, still relatively young, equipped itself with products that facilitated both patient care and a nursing lifestyle. Furthermore, despite some excellent historical analysis undertaken of the relationship between manufactured health goods and advertising to consumers or end-users, focus on advertising’s role in communicating with those providing health services is sparse (Krantzler, 1986).

### **Periodization, Data Sources and Method**

The periodization for this study is 1908-1929. This chronological time span incorporates the first issue of the Kai Tiaki in 1908 and ends 1929, thus representing the launch of the journal and its first two decades. As this was the only nursing journal produced during this period, it served as a major medium for exposure to nursing-related products for the readership. During this period the journal had consistent ownership (till 1923) and editorship by Hester Maclean, a leading NZ nurse. This period was also selected as it incorporates significant global political events that were influential to the development of nursing overall and the personal experiences of nurses as individual consumers. WWI and the Influenza Epidemic of 1918-1919, for example, saw the nursing workforce extensively engaged. Furthermore, many historians of the 1920's regard this point as the true shift to a 20<sup>th</sup> century world and how women viewed their place in society (Fangman et al., 2004). The rise of product availability due to the prosperity of the 1920's and advances in medical science and technology also make it a valuable period of study in advertising to allied health professionals.

A longitudinal content analysis method, informed by Pollay's (1985) study of print advertising in magazines 1900-1980 was used for this study. Examination of the ads was made very possible by the availability of digitalised archival issues of Kai Tiaki. All ads placed during this period were categorised: 1895 in all. A large number of these were repeat placements of the same ad, or a slightly varied creative. Categories used in coding were similar to those used by Pollay (1985): the advertiser and brand, product category, product information and values portrayed, language and art, creative appeal and social situations and behaviours displayed. The ads were also recorded as to type, size and placement. In order to maximize explanatory leverage of the initial quantitative content analysis approach, qualitative historical analysis was used (Thies, 2002; Witkowski and Jones, 2006). As a complementary process, much of the content of the journal was read in parallel. This specialised content, in particular the discussion of professional issues, nursing care of patients and medical interventions, reports on the social life of nurses and experiences abroad (including WWI military service), proved invaluable to understanding both the day-to-day working and social life of nurses and the evolving system of nursing. For increased rigor, several other primary and contemporaneous documents were searched. These included NZTO minutes and conference remits 1900-1930 and other ephemeral archival documents (typed letters, memoirs and various other documents) available. Several other articles and books from this period were also consulted. Findings and themes were finally extracted and then situated within their social context. It is these that are reported here.

### **Findings and Conclusion**

In brief, this study provided an opportunity to investigate advertising to nurses in an early part of the professionalization of the industry. The advertising portrays a valuable and complementary commentary of early NZ nursing. The advertising examined also provides an insight into how outsiders (ie the advertisers) chose to represent nurses and their practice. Much of the advertising during the early phase was functional and product attribute-based, thus merely signalling to nurses the goods and services available that would enable performance of duties (especially in a private setting) and those that would also equip them with essential products to support the nursing lifestyle (accommodation, uniform, shoes). Testimonial appeals were frequent. Many advertisements (ads) were repeated unchanged throughout the years and in some cases, placed in every issue. As time progressed more brands were advertising benefits and "reason-why" as a means of persuasion. The advertising could be considered conservative; especially given the changing social values of the 1920's and with few exceptions, a traditional image of the nurse (symbols and rituals) along with an embedded referral to devotion at all costs was conveyed. However, the nursing readership was reminded in many ads of her vulnerability to untoward health events such as "nervous prostration" and the like because of her work demands and long hours expected. This situation could be prevented or treated with the same tonics administered to her patients. Advertisers exploited their claims of imminent risk to a nurse's health by reminding her she could not fail or fall (Glax-Ovo ad, Kai Tiaki, July 1926, ii). This claim seems supported by the ethos of the day within many of the nursing profession, where 'falling' from a fatal infectious disease caught while caring for patients was seen as a result of slovenly or careless nursing, and nevertheless, all in the line of duty (Wood, 2011). In some instances, the use of ad imagery and copy eminently suitable for placement in women's lifestyle magazines suggests advertisers' understanding of the role of the nurse as equally interchangeable with that of 'mother'. The predominant image of the nurse at the patient's bedside carrying basic household equipment (a tray of tea) or using her hands to administer treatment in a room with no other symbols that would

denote technology seems at odds with the increasing skills needed for rapidly expanding and acute practice settings in hospitals. It is true to say that most nursing at this time occurred privately in patients' homes (O'Connor, 1993) at a time when chronic wasting diseases and long recovery from illness or injury were common. However, even after WWI, where NZ nurses provided complicated surgical support and post-operative care in military hospitals overseas, some even covering for a shortage of anaesthetists (Rawstron, 2005), these images did not change.

Nurses during this period were exposed to many influences shaping practice; training, text books and journals, superiors and peers as well as experience gained on the job. However the use of scientific evidence, complex language and appeals to product safety used by large brands such as Glaxo to gain dominance in the market no doubt would have had a significant impact on the position nurses took in regards to the medical campaigns of the day. One such example is products (infant milk formula and tonics) marketed to support the infant-welfare movement and in particular, Dr Truby King's maternal and infant Plunket Society (founded 1907) which saw nurses heavily involved (Bryder, 2009; King, Snowden and Dean, 1951; Thwaites, 1942). Even so, advertisers, whilst swearing allegiance to Truby King's stand that breast feeding was always preferable to artificial infant feeding suggested still-"nature often needs a little help".

Although little is known about the editor's decisions around the advertising placed, the need for revenue generation was articulated frequently in the editorial of the journal. Maclean, as founder and editor and thus key decision maker in the path the journal took may well have exercised options as to the nature of the advertising space purchased. Several authors note that Maclean was "opinionated" and actively strove to retain the traditional values of nursing (Sargison, 2012) - devotion and commitment - particularly demonstrated through long hours of duty. This is despite in many respects Maclean being at the forefront in the writing and design of innovations from her appointed position in nursing leadership that saw the professional standing and scope of nursing rapidly progress.

In summary advertising in the Kai Tiaki provided a valuable function in communicating goods (both their attributes and value-in-use) to a dispersed and poorly connected body of workers in an early stage of forming into a more organised marketing system. However, the rhetoric and imagery used in the advertising served to reinforce the traditional role of the nurse. This was possibly mutually beneficial for both advertisers and the journal editorship of the period. For the advertisers choosing to place their ads in the journal, it provided a very attractive medium to promote products such as preventative and restorative tonics, created to capitalize on medical ideologies of the day. With nurses trialling, recommending or even adopting for themselves their products, it further strengthened the brand's position as credible, safe and "scientific", in an era when manufacturers were keen to leave their reputation for quackery behind them. For the journal editorship, it is possible that nurses' exposure to the rhetoric and imagery of traditional nursing values in the ads reinforced what was perceived as integral to success in nursing, however much the world outside was changing.

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