

Definitions of Nursing Florence Nightingale defined nursing nearly 150 years ago as “the act of utilizing the environment of the patient to assist him in his recovery” (Nightingale, 1860/1969). Nightingale considered a clean, well-ventilated, and quiet environment essential for recovery. Often considered the first nurse theorist, Nightingale raised the status of nursing through education. Nurses were no longer untrained house-keepers but people educated in the care of the sick. Virginia Henderson was one of the first modern nurses to define nursing. She wrote, “The unique function of the nurse is to assist the individual, sick or well, in the performance of those activities contributing to health or its recovery (or to peaceful death) that he would perform unaided if he had the necessary strength, will, or knowledge, and to do this in such a way as to help him gain independence as rapidly as possible” (Henderson, 1966, p. 3). Like Nightingale, Henderson described nursing in relation to the client and the client's environment. Unlike Nightingale, Henderson saw the nurse as concerned with both healthy and ill individuals, acknowledged that nurses interact with clients even when recovery may not be feasible and mentioned the teaching and advocacy roles of the nurse. In the latter half of the 20th century, a number of nurse theorists developed their own theoretical definitions of nursing. Theoretical definitions are important because they go beyond simplistic common definitions. They describe what nursing is and the interrelationship among nurses, nursing, the client, the environment, and the intended client outcome: health (see Chapter 3 a=). Certain themes are common to many of these definitions: * Nursing is caring. * Nursing is an art. * Nursing is a science. * Nursing is client centered. * Nursing is holistic * Nursing is adaptive. * Nursing is concerned with health promotion, health maintenance, and health restoration. * Nursing is a helping profession