

# Role Model of Excellence

In June 2001, the International Council of Nurses' (ICN) Congress in Copenhagen, Denmark, awarded Dr. Susie Kim the International Achievement Award for Nursing Excellence from the ICN Florence Nightingale International Foundation. The Dean of Ewha Womans University College of Nursing Science, where Dr. Kim teaches, called this the *Nobel Prize* of nursing.

Figure. No caption available.
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However, Susie Kim not only demonstrates excellence in nursing, she also exemplifies consistent Christian living in her professional and personal life. Why did she receive the award? What does her Christian faith have to do with her nursing? I want to answer those questions and introduce you to Susie Kim, whom so many of us in Korea love and respect.

Dr. Kim, professor of psychiatric nursing, is also deeply committed to the Lord. She lives out her faith in God through her nursing. She received the ICN award because of her project, which involved developing community-based nursing programs for chronically ill psychiatric patients. Formerly, these patients would spend as much time in institutions as government funding allowed, only to be

discharged to sit at home with no support.

Kim began to wonder what could be done to help these patients. She wanted them to live full lives and get better, not exist in isolation or sit in institutions all their lives.

Dr. Kim and twenty other psychiatric mental health nurse practitioners devised a community-based rehabilitation program for long-term psychiatric patients. Nurses trained in psychiatric care would visit patients' homes and run the day care centers. Kim submitted a funding proposal to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), asking for \$1,000. The UNDP ended up granting her \$300,000!!

With this money, she set up four community-based mental health programs at two community health centers, one welfare center and a simple church for long-term psychiatric patients and their families on Sunday, called God's Church (*Hananimae Kyo-Hoi*). The pastor felt called to this ministry after his young-adult son developed psychiatric problems. Although the church has few material possessions, the warmth and caring among the congregation of the chronically mentally ill and their caregivers surpass those in many *normal* churches.

Kim says, "Mentally handicapped persons should receive the same kind of care from the system as the physically handicapped. Mental illness is no different from other

illnesses, yet many of our patients are outcasts because of the stigma that society places on them. Through education and training, we need to erase these deep-rooted, distorted beliefs and prejudices that neighbors and society hold about this type of illness."1

One reason that the UNDP was interested in Kim's project was the low cost, since it is community-not institution-based and run by nurses (not physicians). Dr. Kim passionately believes that "long-term psychiatric patients are not hopeless and can benefit from well-planned community care."2

Through these community centers, the patients can overcome their fears and get back into society. They know that the community may not accept them easily, but at the centers, Christian psychiatric nurses encourage them as they gradually get back into normal life. Dr. Kim has recognized that most psychiatric patients are happiest when they are with family. The family members' love and interest are the most important factors in helping the patients return to normalcy.3

A few months after Dr. Kim received the award in Copenhagen, Ewha Womans University held a congratulatory dinner for her. Many people attended-fellow professors, a professor of psychiatry she had studied under during her master's program, her students (called *disciples*

in Korea), the pastor of God's Church and a woman from her church who attends the couples' Bible study led by Kim and her husband, Linsu Kim, to name a few. One of the recovering psychiatric patients from the community center spoke about Dr. Kim's loving character. Kim beamed as she heard the young woman share.

Figure. No caption available.

One of Dr. Kim's close friends, Mija Kim (former vice-chancellor of the University of Illinois in Chicago), said, "I think one of Susie's spiritual gifts is her generosity; she is always giving to other people!!" A UNDP representative said, "Susie's '\$1,000 project' is actually priceless: restoring health and human dignity to individuals and allowing them to live with their families is priceless." Someone else said, "Susie has been involved in nursing in all three areas: as a professor, as a researcher and as a clinician."

To learn more about this esteemed nursing mentor, I asked her some questions.

**CF (Carol Findlay):** How did you become interested in nursing?

**SK (Susie Kim):** I grew up in the country in the far south of Korea. In 1948 I was about six years old. A Communist uprising broke out in my hometown; this was two years

before the Korean War. A wounded young man came to the classroom where fifty others and I were being held. Most of the people in our town were captives in the elementary school. A lady in our group took care of the young man's wounds and helped him through the night. I was fascinated!! I asked her, "Who are you?"

She said, "I am a nurse." From that moment on, I wanted to be a nurse.

**CF:** How did you come to know the Lord?

**SK:** My parents weren't Christians, but when I was about five, I heard some singing and followed it. It was at a church. The Sunday-school teacher hugged my dirty little sister; I thought, *Wow!!* I wanted to go to church. From that time on, my life consisted of three things: church, school and the hospital. I would help at the hospital, and they called me *little nurse*. Then our family moved up to Seoul when I was in middle school. One Sunday night at church, an Australian missionary preached in English. To test my English, I listened to his sermon.

He said, "Unless you are born again, you cannot go to the kingdom of God." I was shocked!! I had never heard that before, and it scared me to think that I might not be able to go to heaven.

I asked my local pastor how I could be born again, but he said, "Don't worry about that. You are a good Christian. Just keep going to church."

That didn't satisfy me. Someone said, "If you want to know the answer to your question, ask the missionary at Severance Hospital; she has an English Bible study." I went there and heard the gospel plainly. The missionary, Helen Koepp, gave an invitation, and I received Christ. She also taught me how to have devotions.

**CF:** How have you seen God work in your life?

**SK:** (with a surprised look) He is at work in all areas of my life!! I serve others in Jesus' name-anyone and everyone I meet.

One example of God's leading in my life was when I was finishing high school and applying to a nursing program. We didn't have any money, but I knew God wanted me to become a nurse. I found a three-year program entirely funded by the government, but I wasn't accepted because of an age requirement.

My high-school teacher encouraged me to apply to Ewha. I did and was accepted and was granted scholarships. But the scholarships didn't start for first-year students until the second semester. I prayed. Three days before the deadline

for paying tuition fees, I received a special letter from an American couple. I had done some translation work for them when they were in Korea. The letter contained one hundred dollars!! It covered all the expenses for my first semester. God provides!!

**CF:** How did you get interested in psychiatric nursing?

**SK:** When I was working as a nurse on a medical-surgical unit, a cousin developed a psychiatric problem. I thought, *How can we help him lead a normal life, or as normal a life as possible?* That began my interest in psychiatric nursing.

**CF:** How does your Christian faith affect how you relate to psychiatric patients?

**SK:** Jesus loves me. If I love that patient in Jesus' name, the patient can sense that, even though he is a psychiatric patient.

**CF:** What does your faith have to do with your academic and research interests?

**SK:** I have the academic training, so I need to use it to develop the field of psychiatric nursing.

**CF:** How do you balance your professional life with being a wife, mother and grandmother?

**SK:** I am a nurse all the time!! I don't separate my profession from the other areas of my life. My husband and I put a priority on our relationship, and we communicate often. Sometimes we even write letters to each other!! I talk with my two children who are in the States (Sue in Los Angeles and Lin in Chicago) each week. Our third child, Jean, lives at home.

How do I see the grandkids in the U.S.? I arrange to stop by on the way to or from conferences, during sabbatical leave or holiday time. I make sure to spend time with them. And, there's always e-mail.

**CF:** Your daughter, Sue, has completed her doctorate in nursing. What advice have you given to her about her nursing career?

**SK:** I encouraged her to go through the normal steps of career development-doctorate, post-doctoral research, teaching and clinical experience before standing independently as a researcher. All three areas are important-practice, theory and research.

**CF:** How do you keep God first in your life?

**SK:** God is a priority to me. When I get up in the morning, I remember: "God, you are here!!" Of course, I have a daily quiet time, but I continue to communicate with the Lord



throughout the day. Through every situation, I think and decide what to do on the basis of God's values. Church is a priority. My husband and I teach a couples' class, and on Thursday evenings we have a Bible study at our home.

**CF:** You recently received the International Achievement Award for Nursing Excellence from the ICN, and you were featured in the Sigma Theta Tau magazine *Reflections* several years ago. What does this international recognition mean to you?

**SK:** I was doing what I should do as a Christian nurse. As others see me as a nurse, they see that my unique characteristic is my faith; so, this is one way to share Christ with others. If that award draws attention to community-based health care for the mentally handicapped, great. I want people everywhere to realize that psychiatric patients are valuable. They can live outside of institutions. They can live normal lives. If the ICN award helps people realize this, I'm happy.

**CF:** How can the church minister to people with chronic mental illness?

**SK:** The church has to realize that it is important to care for these people. The church can help with preventing mental illness by reaching out to high-risk people, such as teenagers and vulnerable adults. The church adds the faith

dimension and can love and care for them. The church can accept them and love them as human beings.

**CF:** Why is it important to have this special church serving primarily the chronically mentally ill, rather than encouraging the patients to go to a regular church?

**SK:** The regular congregation won't accept these people!! These patients are tense when they are in a regular church. So, God's Church plays an important role in helping these patients recover.

In nursing, and among Christian nurses, we need role models-faithful Christian nurse leaders who we can look at and say, "So that is what a Christian nurse looks like." Susie Kim is a role model of a Christian nurse in South Korea and around the world. How can a nurse combine being a disciple of Jesus, a wife, a mother, a grandmother, a professor, a researcher, a practitioner and a minister in the local church and community? Susie Kim is one example.

1 "The Mother of the Isolated Psychiatric Patients," *Kukmin Daily* (April 24, 1998), 21. [Context Link]

2 Susie Kim, "Out of Darkness," *Sigma Theta Tau Reflections*, (third quarter 1998), 12. [Context Link]

3 *Kukmin Daily*, 21. [Context Link]

## **Section Description**

I am a nurse all the time!! I don't separate my profession from the other areas of my life.