



Holistic Nursing: Ushering in a New Paradigm of Healing and Wellness

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How do we reconstruct a healthcare system that is primarily concerned with disease and illness to include a major focus on health and wellness? How can we integrate holistic healing and caring practices into our hospitals and communities? What steps are needed, and what is the role of nurses and other professionals in this process?

We have entered a new era of health care in which leaders, administrators, practitioners and consumers are actively seeking answers to these questions. Implementing holistic models and inviting healing practices and professionals into the healthcare system is a necessary first step. Holistic nurses will play an integral part in creating this new paradigm of healing and wellness.

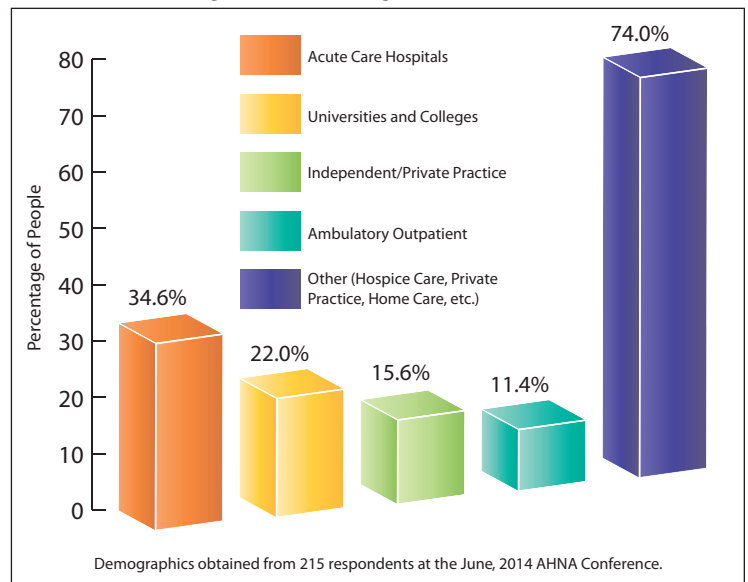
What is Holistic Nursing?

“What do holistic nurses do? Where do they work? Do I need special education and training to become a holistic nurse?”

Holistic nursing is defined as “all nursing practice that has healing the whole person as its goal” (AHNA & ANA, 2013, p.1). Holistic nursing can be practiced in any setting. Demographics obtained from a recent conference of the American Holistic Nurses Association (AHNA) show that approximately 35% of holistic

nurses work in hospitals, 22% in universities and colleges, 16% in private practice, and 12% in ambulatory and outpatient services. (See figure 1).

Figure 1: Work Settings of Holistic Nurses



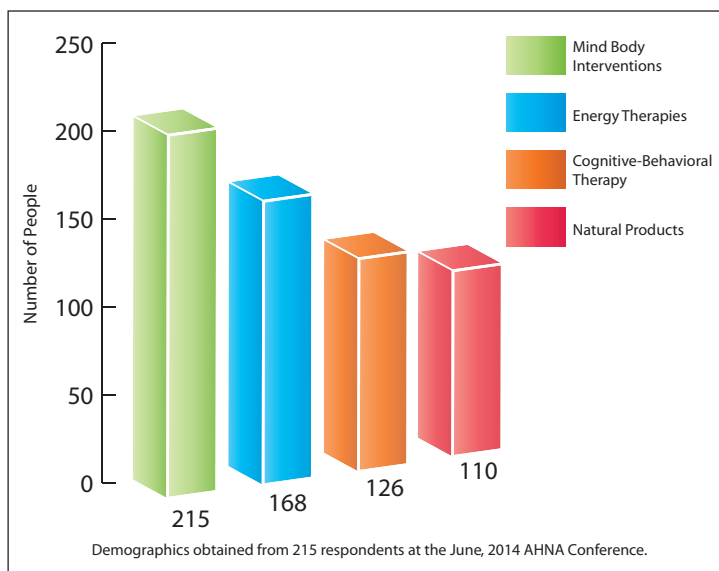
Holistic nurses utilize a variety of approaches and modalities in providing holistic care. Some of the common interventions that holistic nurses incorporate include: subtle energy healing (e.g. Healing Touch, Therapeutic Touch, Reiki, etc.), reflexology, guided imagery, biofeedback, aromatherapy, massage, nutritional counseling, cognitive therapy, life style counseling, breathing and relaxation



techniques, music and sound therapy and acupuncture. (See figure 2)

However, holistic nursing involves more than utilizing healing modalities. Holistic nursing is a way of being and living -- and -- a way of practice!

Figure 2: Practices and Therapies Used by Holistic Nurses



A Way of Being and Living

Being a Caring and Healing Presence:

A primary focus of holistic nursing is to return “caring” and “healing” to our health care system. The first step in this process is for nurses to learn to love and care for themselves. While this may seem a selfish pursuit, it is not. Learning to care deeply for ourselves by taking the time to nurture ourselves physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually is absolutely essential. When we do so, we begin to realize our wholeness and we actually *become a healing presence* for our patients.

Who you are, how you feel inside, and the attitude that you convey have a profound effect on the people around you. When you are depleted and exhausted you create an unhealthy environment by your presence. If, on the other hand, you are well rested and

feel content and peaceful inside you create a healthy and wholesome environment by your very presence.

Taking good care of yourself is a prerequisite to providing holistic care that is healing. Learning to listen deeply to your own heart and your own truth allows you to connect in a deeply caring way. As Jean Watson says, *We must learn to treat ourselves with love and respect before we are able to treat others that way.* (Watson, 1998). Love and caring are essential in the healing process, both for ourselves and those we serve!

Role Models for Healthy and Wholesome Living:

Holistic nurses strive to be models of wholesome and healthy behavior by creating optimal health in every aspect of their lives – physically, mentally, emotionally, socially and spiritually. This is a lifelong journey that involves valuing who we are, appreciating the preciousness of our existence, and treating ourselves with loving-kindness in all that we do. It is about living consciously; being aware of what we eat, how we care for our bodies, who we bring into our lives, the quality of our relationships, and the meaning and usefulness of our work. (Thornton, 2013, p.151).

Resistance to change, self-doubt, and low self-esteem can block our journey to optimal nurturance. Examining these blocks is crucial for understanding and identifying sources of resistance. Many of these attitudes and beliefs are caused by social conditioning and early life experiences that simply no longer apply to adult life. Being willing to explore what lies beneath the surface is important if we are to create healthy and wholesome patterns of living.

Commitment to Self-Care, Self-Exploration and Awareness:

A commitment to self-care is foundational to holistic nursing and to all healers, for that matter. Taking time to examine and explore the various aspects of your life is the first step in this process. Gaining an awareness of your patterns and habits and bringing



into consciousness that which has been unconscious is important (see Sidebar I). Some of the practices utilized by holistic nurses for self-exploration and awareness include meditation, creating time for reflection and introspection, dream work, mindfulness practice, and journaling (Thornton, 2013).

Commitment to Caring for the Environment:

Holistic nurses advocate and promote healthy environments and the healing of our planet. Just as Florence Nightingale advocated and understood the

importance of fresh air and clean surroundings for her patients, so too, holistic nurses promote practices that help ensure the sustainability of our Earth. Holistic nurses understand that the health of our planet is inextricably linked to the health of every individual.

A Way of Practice

Centering and Intention Setting

Centering and creating an intention for healing are processes in which the holistic nurse engages prior

Sidebar I: Questions for Self-Exploration and Awareness

Take some time each day to reflect on an aspect of your life. Here are some questions to help you explore various aspects of your life:

Physical:

- Is my diet optimal?
- Does my intake consist mainly of whole and natural foods?
- Are my elimination patterns frequent and regular? Do I receive optimal sleep and rest daily?
- Do I engage in beneficial movement and exercise daily?
- Do my breathing patterns promote well-being?

Mental:

- Do I have a problem-solving orientation toward life rather than a victim mentality?
- Do I usually have a positive attitude and positive thoughts toward school and work?
- Do I have a sense of humor?
- Do I possess self-awareness – am I objective about my strengths, limitations and possibilities?
- Am I able to perceive reality with clarity?

Emotional:

- Do I love and accept myself and others?
- Am I able to give and receive love from myself and others?
- Am I able to express my own truth?
- Am I able to have deep feelings of identification, sympathy, and affection for others?

Social/Relational:

- Do I engage in relationships that are wholesome and loving?
- Do I engage in relationships that promote growth in my self and others?
- Am I able to set healthy boundaries with others?
- Do I engage in work that is meaningful?

Spiritual/Energetic:

- Am I able to connect with God/higher self/universe/spirit?
- Do I engage in meditation/prayer/introspective practices regularly?
- Do I know and understand love as the essence of self?
- Do I have a deep respect for all?

Take your time in addressing each of these questions. Remember this is a life long process of deep inner inquiry and growth. As you go through these questions, note when you respond with a powerful “no”. These are the areas that you need to pay attention to. Focus on one area at a time. Create some short term and long term goals for each of the areas that you want to improve. Remember to treat yourself with compassion, love and kindness!

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to any patient interaction. Centering involves setting aside concerns and thoughts, focusing attention on your heart, and connecting with feelings of love and compassion.

Setting an intention is a powerful way for the nurse to create an optimal environment for a caring-healing interaction. Examine the following intention: *I am here for the greater good of this person. I set aside my own concerns and worries and am fully present to the person here and now.* With this intention the nurse is consciously setting aside her own concerns and focusing on the patient; she has set into motion the dynamic that this interaction will be for the greater good of this person; and she is making a conscious decision to be fully present. The nurse, through this intention, creates an environment that promotes and sustains a caring-healing interaction. (See Sidebar II)

Acknowledgment of the Infinite, Sacred, and Energetic Nature of Being

Holistic nursing acknowledges that people are infinite, sacred and energetic beings. Florence Nightingale spoke of human beings as *a reflection of the Divine with physical, metaphysical and intellectual attributes* (McCrae, 1995). Jean Watson teaches that we are sacred Beings (Watson, 1998). Martha Rogers stated that *each person is an irreducible, indivisible, pandimensional energy field* (Rogers, 1992, p.29). The Model of Whole Person Caring combines the key concepts of these nurse theorists and defines a person as: *An energy field that is open, infinite, and spiritual in essence and in continual mutual process with the environment. Each person manifests unique physical, mental, emotional, and social/relational patterns that are interrelated, inseparable, and continually evolving* (Thornton, 2013, p. 42). Thus, from the perspective of holistic nursing theorists and models, people are energy fields that are infinite and sacred in nature. This orientation makes a difference in how we approach each other. It shifts how we speak, how we listen, how we relate and how we interact.

This perspective also creates a foundation in which the practice of subtle energy therapies like Healing Touch makes sense. In the prevailing biomedical paradigm people are perceived to be an amalgamation of molecules and atoms that interact in a predictable fashion based on laws of mathematics, chemistry, and physics (Curtis and Gaylord, 2004). In the biomedical paradigm, the use of subtle energy therapies makes no sense whatsoever. When we redefine who we are and acknowledge our energetic essence then subtle energy practices make perfect sense and can be explained within the context of this new paradigm.

Caring/Healing/Transcendent Presence

Another characteristic of holistic practice is the depth and profound quality of presence that the nurse has with her patients. Jean Watson speaks of the full use of self in the transpersonal caring process. When the nurse becomes heart-centered she has the capacity to resonate with the person at a heart/soul level. At this level, the nurse connects with the person at a deep

Sidebar II: Centering and Intention Setting Technique

- Pause for a moment before engaging with patient or client.
- Set aside any concerns regarding the past or the future. These can be picked up when leaving the room.
- Gently close your eyes.
- Breathe deeply and slowly.
- Repeat to yourself, I am here for the greater good of this patient – I give my full attention to the here and now.
- Direct awareness to the area around your heart, bringing to mind something or someone that evokes your love and compassion.
- When connected with that feeling of love and compassion repeat again, I am present to the moment.
- This entire process should take only between 5 and 10 seconds.

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psychosocial and spiritual level. The nurse must be able to connect with her own heart/soul/transcendent nature before she can establish that connection with others.

Integrative and Collaborative Practice

Holistic nurses understand the importance of collaborating with other healing practitioners in order to provide care that considers the whole-person. This is especially important with the rise in chronic conditions that involve a multitude of social, psychological, and physical problems. The Institute of Medicine reports, *As the delivery of care becomes more complex across a wide range of settings, and the need to coordinate care among multiple providers becomes ever more important, developing well-functioning teams becomes a crucial objective throughout the healthcare system* (Institute of Medicine, 2010, p. 72). Holistic nurses can help coordinate the myriad of professionals (e.g. physicians, physical therapists, social workers, naturopaths, chiropractors, acupuncturists, energy healers, massage therapists, homoeopathists, etc.) into a well functioning team. The holistic nurse's knowledge of both traditional and alternative healing practices and professions helps guide the patient in obtaining the most appropriate, least invasive and cost-effective care possible.

In addition, holistic nurses are skilled in a variety of healing therapies and modalities. Many holistic nurses have taken advanced courses or have received additional certification in areas such as Healing Touch, Reiki, Therapeutic Touch, nurse coaching, integrative practice, reflexology, nutritional counseling, body-mind therapies, homeopathy, music therapy, and aromatherapy to name a few.

Education and Board Certification in Holistic Nursing

There are currently 12 undergraduate programs in the United States (U.S.) endorsed by the American Holistic Nurse Certification Corporation (AHNCC) that

prepare undergraduate students in holistic nursing.

To be eligible for board certification by the AHNCC at the basic holistic nursing level (HN-BC), a nurse is required to have: (1) an active, unrestricted U.S. license; (2) a baccalaureate or higher degree; (3) at least one year of full-time practice or 2,000 hours of part-time practice within the last five years as a holistic nurse or graduation from an AHNCC-endorsed university; and (4) a minimum of 48 contact hours of holistic nursing continuing education within the last 2 years.

After becoming eligible for certification both a qualitative assessment and a quantitative examination must be passed before certification may be obtained.


Board certification is also offered at the advanced practice level (AHN-BC & APHN-BC) for nurses with graduate degrees and nurse practitioners. The eligibility criteria for advanced practice are similar and certification also requires passing a qualitative assessment and a quantitative exam. The AHNCC also offers certification for Nurse Coach, Board Certified (NC-BC); or Health and Wellness Nurse Coach, Board Certified (HWNC-BC). For more information access the AHNCC website at: www.ahncc.org.

The American Holistic Nurses Association (AHNA) endorses and sponsors a variety of educational programs related to holistic nursing practice. For more information access the AHNA website at: www.ahna.org.

A New Vision

A new vision for health care is emerging. It is a vision that brings health, healing, compassion, and wellness into the conversation. It is a vision that invites professionals to work together to create a healthy and sustainable society. It puts people, their needs, their dreams, and their lives at the core of its efforts. It holds promise and sets us on a course toward a vital and healthy nation (Thornton, 2013, p.4).



Changing paradigms—especially when it causes us to transform the way we view ourselves and how the world around us functions—does not come easily. This type of cultural shift takes innovation, creativity and wise leadership. Holistic nurses are in a unique position to help guide the change and step to the plate as transformational leaders in this new era of health care (Thornton, 2014, p. 31). 

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