



Whole Person Caring: A New Paradigm for 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 subtle energy practices into our hospitals, clinics, practices and communities? We've entered a new era of health care in which leaders, administrators, practitioners and consumers are actively seeking answers to these questions. In my own experience developing the model of Whole-Person Caring, I have discovered that embracing a holistic perspective can provide a solid foundation for an interprofessional journey toward health, healing, and wellness.

The Model of Whole-Person Caring (WPC), developed in 1999, was created out of necessity. I had been working with a hospital for several years offering programs for staff renewal and development. The opportunity arose to offer several one-day renewal programs in a row so that approximately 20 percent of the medical surgical staff were able to attend. These programs were based on principles of holistic nursing with a focus on healing and self-care.

A month after delivering the programs, I received a call from the nursing manager saying that the environment in the workplace had dramatically improved and that patient satisfaction had significantly increased. She said that physicians who would normally

complain about the nursing care were now complimenting the staff and management on the care provided. She attributed the positive changes to the renewal programs that I had offered to the staff.

We observed the patient satisfaction data, and after three months, the increased levels gradually declined to the previous baseline. Nonetheless, the positive spike caught the attention of the Director of Clinical Services, and we began discussing strategies for a sustainable outcome. Previous programs were designed for nurses. We realized that in order to create sustainable change in an organizational culture, the effort needed to be all-inclusive and all-pervasive. A decision was made to develop a comprehensive program for professional and ancillary staff. It was necessary to create a model of care that every discipline and every profession could relate to, and to design an educational program that was interdisciplinary and inter-professional as well.

Models define who we are, what we do, and how we do it. In order to create a model that was based on healing and wellness, reconstructing how we perceive ourselves was necessary. I realized that this would involve a major paradigmatic shift in our perception.

Our current biomedical paradigm sees the physical body as the only dimension of human existence. This



is what has been valued, believed and consecrated for the past 300 years. This idea that *we are only our bodies* is one of the deepest underlying assumptions in our scientific culture. This view has guided our practice, our research, and our lives for the past three centuries and has little room for concepts such as love, joy, hope, compassion, and healing. These concepts do not fit. They are difficult to measure, they can not be reduced, nor can they be predicted.

The very things that make us happy and healthy are the things that are rejected by the prevailing scientific paradigm! It may seem a silly philosophical pursuit

I borrowed from three nurse theorists in developing a definition for who we are. The founder of nursing, Florence Nightingale stated *we are a reflection of the divine with physical, metaphysical, and intellectual attributes*. Martha Rogers saw each person as an *irreducible, indivisible, pandimensional energy field that is open and infinite in nature and inseparable from the environment*. And Jean Watson, a contemporary nurse theorist, states, *we are sacred beings, we must regard ourselves and others with deepest respect, dignity, mystery and awe*.

The WPC model combines these concepts and

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to redefine who we are, but unless we do, we cannot move forward in our thinking. Our thinking and our consciousness must expand to embrace that which we have rejected if we are to foster healing and wellness in our world.

defines 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*. (See Table 1).

Concept	Definition
Person	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.
Health	The subjective experience of well being.
Whole-Person Caring	The delivery of care and services to promote well being. Whole-Person Caring is based on the concepts of: Sacredness of Being; Therapeutic Partnering; Self-compassion, Self-care and Self-healing; Optimal Wellness; Transformational Leadership, and Caring as Sacred Practice.
Spiritual	The spiritual dimension is a unifying field that integrates the physical, mental, emotional, and social/relational aspects of being. The spiritual dimension is the essence of self and also transcends the self. It is our closest, most direct experience of the universal life force.
Therapeutic Partnering	A relationship between people whose common mission and purpose is to promote healing and wellness and is characterized by mutual power, respect, compassion, trust, and clear communication.
Optimal Wellness	A state of health that arises when every aspect of ourselves (physical, mental, social/relational, and emotional) is aligned and integrated with the spiritual foundation of our being.

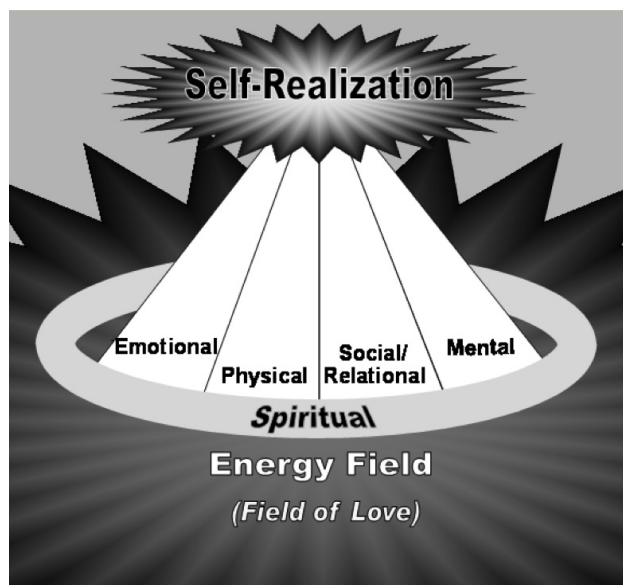


Figure 1: Concept of Whole-Person

The metaphor of a diamond is used to conceptualize who we are (Figure 1). From the perspective of the model, our manifest self arises from the unmanifest universe or the void, as it is sometimes referred to. While there is a total absence of matter in this realm (hence the name, the void), it is filled with complete and perfect knowingness and absolute and unconditional love. Rather than being called the void it might be more likened to the *womb of God*. Yogananda referred to this realm as the *unmanifest Absolute*.

Emerging from the unmanifest Absolute or unmanifest universe is the energy field. In the WPC model this field of energy is also referred to as the field of Love. For the purpose of this model this field of energy is considered to be the first field of the manifest universe. Each and every one of us arises from this primal energetic field. It is our common ground – *our shared essence*. This metaphor points us in the direction of understanding our true nature . . .

If we are open, infinite fields of energy, then not only are we finite forms that exist on this earth, but we simultaneously share in the essence of the unmanifest Absolute. And, if we are open, infinite fields of energy, then not only do we occupy and move about in our

individual physical space, but we also simultaneously exist in a unified collective energy field with all Beings. This helps us understand and conceptualize the teachings of spiritual masters who proclaim “we are all one.”

The base or foundation of the diamond is our spiritual nature. The *Self*, with a capital “S” is the essence of who we are and arises from and is inseparable from the spiritual field and the field of Love. (While this *Self* cannot be seen in Figure 1, imagine that it occupies the whole interior of the diamond and is obscured from your view by the various facets of our existence.) The facets of the diamond are our physical, social/relational, emotional and mental selves. While each of these facets, or aspects, manifests in a particular way, each remains an inseparable, interrelated aspect of the whole diamond. As Elizabeth Barrett said, *in reality there is no mind, no body, no spirit, only the inherent unity of who we are*.

The concept of spirituality is foundational to the model. Unlike other models that view spirituality as an aspect of our being, this model purports that the very foundation of our being is spiritual. As Teilhard de Chardin stated, *we are not physical beings having a spiritual experience, we are spiritual beings having a physical experience*.

The WPC model is useful in helping to explain the phenomena associated with many healing practices and with whole systems of medicine. By defining human beings as *energy fields that are open and infinite in nature*, the model creates a framework in which subtle energy therapies—and whole systems of medicine based on subtle energies—make sense. Medical systems such as traditional Chinese medicine, Ayurvedic medicine, naturopathy, and homeopathy, which treat the whole person, have valuable contributions to make to our health care system. They focus on prevention, patient empowerment, healthy lifestyles, and the low utilization of high-cost interventions. The WPC model creates a framework that invites the integration of healing practices and whole systems of medicine. When we perceive ourselves as fields of energy, those



practices that are based in modulating and balancing energy systems make perfect sense.

The intention of the model was to facilitate healing at both an individual and organizational level. In developing the model several key concepts emerged as being essential for creating healing, health and wellness for individuals and for organizations. These concepts have been revised and changed throughout the years.

ness into the conversation. It is a vision that invites professionals and healers 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 course toward a vital and healthy society. The model of Whole-Person Caring is a guide in this process. The model operationalizes concepts of healing in our personal and professional lives. However, it is only a model! It

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The key concepts of the WPC Model are:

- The Infinite and Sacred Nature of Being
- Self-Compassion, Self-Care and Self-Healing
- Optimal Wellness
- Therapeutic Partnering
- Transformational Leadership and
- Caring as Sacred Practice

From the perspective of the model, people are infinite and sacred in nature. This orientation makes a difference in how we approach each other. When we perceive ourselves and others to be sacred, it shifts how we speak, listen, and interact - our words, actions, and behaviors are filled with love and compassion and promote a caring and healing environment.

Our relationship to illness, diseases, and death shifts dramatically when we view ourselves and others as infinite beings with finite bodies. Care may be oriented to the soul's purpose in addition to symptom relief. This orientation creates a potential to explore and derive meaning from life's challenges and facilitate healing even in the face of death and terminal illness. When one understands that this physical life is a small part of the infinite journey, the stigma of death becomes obsolete and enables us to be fully present to persons with terminal illnesses and those facing death. A new vision for health care is emerging. It is a vision that brings health, healing, compassion and well-

is up to each of us to bring these concepts alive in our life and work. It is OUR task to bring forth this new paradigm of healing and wellness!

Articles and a Curriculum Guide on Whole-Person Caring may be downloaded for free at: www.lucia-thornton.com. The WPC model described in this article along with practices and suggestion for implementation are contained in Whole-Person Caring: An Interprofessional Model for Healing and Wellness, authored by Lucia Thornton (2013) and published by Sigma Theta Tau International. Copyright © 2014 by Lucia Thornton. 



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