

# Hallmarks of Holistic Nursing

Good for your patients, your practice and the profession

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**H**OLISTIC HEALTH HAS GAINED widespread attention in the media and among healthcare professionals. Self-care and holistic health books are available in bookstores, and information on alternative/complementary therapies can be found easily on the Internet. As a result, patients today come to healthcare providers informed about and requesting holistic therapies.

The field of holistic nursing also has become more visible in the nursing profession, but just what is this nursing specialty all about? Here's a look at some of the hallmarks of holistic nursing practice.

## The Whole Person

*Kristin works as a nurse on the orthopedic unit of a small community hospital. When her patient, Mrs. W, expressed an interest in learning some guided imagery exercises to prepare for hip replacement surgery, Kristin was glad to teach her, knowing guided imagery can help with relaxation and promote healthy postop outcomes.*

*After Mrs. W. returned from surgery, Kristin entered the room, greeted her by name, asked how she was feeling and inquired if her husband had visited. Kristin checked the dressing, observed tension in Mrs. W's face and listened carefully to the tone of the response.*

*"No, Jake has not visited all day and I am*

*concerned about him," Mrs. W replied.*

*Knowing worry and tension could influence the healing process; Kristin touched her patient's shoulder and asked if she would like her to call her husband.*

*"Yes, please," she replied.*

*Before placing the call, Kristin encouraged her to take a few deep breaths, and Mrs. W began to relax.*

replacement in room 203" and forget there is a whole person "attached" to the hip. If you are running into a patient's room and have your mind on what you've just been doing or what you have to do next, the quality of connection with the patient will be less than satisfying — for both of you.

The word "holistic" — derived from the Indo-European root meaning "whole, healthful, healing" — reminds us to view the person in their entirety, considering their body, mind, emotions and spirit. Considering how one's environment (home, work, community, etc.) influences their health and well-being also is an important aspect of holistic nursing care.

Janet Quinn, PhD, RN, describes "the nurse as a healing environment" ... not just the nurse being *in* a healing environment.<sup>1</sup> This means the nurse's way of being and the quality of her presence contributes to the healing potential of the patient.

Becoming fully present at work can be as simple as pausing, quieting your mind and identifying what healing qualities you want to have for your interactions. You

might find that as you practice being really present with your patients, they will be less likely to ring the call bell all day.

Try it! It does take practice so consider pausing a moment before each new interaction, take a cleansing breath and then connecting with your patient.

*On her way to work each day, Kristin listens to calming music, setting her* ➤



## Being Fully Present

Nursing is both a science and an art. We've become highly skilled experts in the use of advanced technology, and yet our patients want and need to feel a caring connection with their nurses.

Unfortunately, it's all too easy to fall into the habit of identifying a patient as "the hip

intention to be present with her patients and to provide the best care possible. She also performs some deep breathing exercises to ground herself. She knows being present enhances the quality of each interaction so she remembers to return to her intention throughout the workday and to take a deep breath before she enters each patient's room.

### Self-Care: A Pathway to Quality

Kristen learned through holistic nursing courses that self-care is necessary so she can be more present for her patients and colleagues. She knows self-care can take many forms. She began to make small changes over time, beginning with improving her diet and adding a weekly yoga class.

Now that it's springtime, she walks outside 3 days a week and bicycles with her 10-year-old daughter on the weekends. Kristen is feeling good about herself and knows these changes have influenced the quality of her nursing care. Her colleagues have noticed a change in Kristen's energy and several are following in her footsteps.

Becoming a healing presence takes practice. It starts with caring for ourselves so we bring our best selves to work every day. If our own vessel is empty and we are exhausted and overextended, this will influence the quality of care we are able to provide for our patients. We've all seen the effects of burnout in fellow

## Holistic Nurse Resources

### Organizations

- American Holistic Nurses' Association (AHNA)  
800-278-2462; info@ahna.org  
<http://www.ahna.org/>
- American Holistic Nurses' Certification Corp. (AHNCC)  
877-284-0996; ahncc@flash.net  
<http://www.ahncc.org/>

### Journals

- Holistic Nursing Practice  
<http://www.hnpjjournal.com/>
- Journal of Holistic Nursing  
<http://jhn.sagepub.com/>

### Books

- Dossey, B. (Ed.). (1997). *Core curriculum for holistic nursing*. Boston: Jones & Bartlett.
- Dossey, B., Keegan, L., & Guzzetta, C. (2005). *Holistic nursing: A handbook for practice (4th ed.)*. Boston: Jones & Bartlett.
- Snyder, M., & Lindquist, R. (2002). *Complementary/alternative therapies in nursing (4th ed.)*. New York: Springer Publishing.

## Figure: AHNA Core Values of Holistic Nursing Practice

### Core Value 1: Holistic Philosophy, Theories & Ethics

Holistic nursing practice is based on the philosophy and theory of holism and the foundation of ethical practice.

### Core Value 2: Holistic Education & Research

Holistic nursing practice is guided by, and developed through, holistic education and research.

### Core Value 3: Holistic Nurse Self-Care

Holistic nursing practice requires the integration of self-care and personal development activities into one's life.

### Core Value 4: Holistic Communication, Therapeutic Environment & Cultural Diversity

Holistic nursing practice honors and includes holistic communication, therapeutic environment and cultural diversity as foundational concepts.

### Core Value 5: Holistic Caring Process

Holistic nursing practice is guided by the holistic caring process, whether used with individuals, families, population groups or communities.

nurses, maybe even felt it ourselves at times. While a stressful work environment is a big contributor to burnout, we must recognize and take responsibility for our own needs.

If you find yourself coming up with excuses not to take better care of yourself, take a tip from Sarah Ban Breathnach, author of *Simple Abundance*: "Self care is never selfish, it is simply good stewardship of the gifts we've been given."<sup>2</sup> As nurses we are always encouraging others to make healthy lifestyle decisions. It's time we let our actions speak as loudly as our words.

### Implementing Therapies

Holistic nurses are known for incorporating integrative modalities that address their patients' needs from a whole person perspective. These modalities are also referred to as complementary and alternative modalities (CAM).

However, simply introducing these modalities in patient care does not qualify as holistic practice. Authentic holistic practice requires understanding and applying the philosophy and principles of mind-body-spirit care in all aspects of practice. Once that foundation is in place, review the research and select evidence-based integrative practices that fall within your state's scope of nursing practice.

Before clinical implementation, it is equally important to check with your facility's policy on integrative practices. If there are none in place, volunteer to lead a committee to explore the benefits to patients and providers.

Kristen has been asked by her nurse manager to participate on a committee to integrate holistic practices in her hospital. As Kristen prepares for the first meeting, she knows it is important to focus on current research which shows evidence-based integrative practices improve patient outcomes.

When she meets with the committee, she suggests a continuing education class be offered to all healthcare professionals to introduce them to the basic principles of holistic care. Kristen and a cardiologist with training in mindfulness-based stress reduction agree to co-chair the committee. Kristin is one step closer to her vision of integrating holistic practice in patient care throughout the medical center.

### A Nursing Specialty

Founded in 1981, the American Holistic Nurses Association (AHNA) is the professional organization for holistic nursing and has a mission to "unite nurses in healing." The AHNA currently has about 3,000 members and is growing steadily.

The AHNA Standards of Holistic Nursing Practice contains five core values (see Figure) that serve to guide holistic nurses in their personal lives and professional practice. These values reflect the diverse areas in which holistic nurses practice.

The American Holistic Nurses' Certification Corp. (AHNCC) is responsible for the administration of the Holistic Nurses' Certification Examination. This exam is based upon the *AHNA Core Curriculum for Holistic Nursing* and is offered on basic (HN,BC) and advanced (AHN,BC) levels. Currently, there are 1,011 certified holistic nurses in the United States

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## SAVE THE DATE!

The 2006 American Holistic Nurses Association National Conference, "Holism in Action: Building Integrated Healthcare," will be held June 7-10 in St. Paul, MN. The event is being sponsored in collaboration with the American Holistic Medical Association.

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(750 are HN,BC and 261 are AHN,BC). Recertification is required every 5 years.

Nurses who wish to become board-certified in holistic nursing must exhibit expertise in the field by demonstrating their knowledge base and skills on a written exam. Examinations are offered twice a year. Nurses can acquire the knowledge and skills needed through approved continuing education or endorsed schools of nursing.

The AHNCC endorses academic schools whose curriculums prepare students for the practice of holistic nursing reflect the AHNA's philosophy of nursing, code of holistic nursing ethics and standards of holistic nursing practice. Nurses who have graduated from endorsed schools may be eligible for an expedited certification process. There are currently 14 AHNCC-endorsed schools in the United States. For a list of endorsed schools, visit <http://www.ahncc.org/pages/1/index.htm>.

Certificate programs endorsed by the AHNA offer content based on a well-developed body of knowledge congruent with the AHNA philosophy and standards of holistic nursing practice. Endorsed programs teach knowledge and/or skills that can be legally integrated into nursing practice and must have a scientific research base. For a list of endorsed certificate programs, visit [www.ahna.org/edu/endorsed.html](http://www.ahna.org/edu/endorsed.html).

### Transform Your Practice

Holistic nursing practice can be integrated into any nursing setting. Incorporating daily self-care techniques and practicing being fully present with patients can enhance your nursing practice.

What's more, evidence-based research, CAM best practices and professional organizations dedicated to integrative care help advance the visibility and recognition of nursing as a profession.

In short, holistic nursing really is good for your patients, your practice and the profession. It holds the potential to transform the healthcare system into a caring and healing environment. ■

### References

- Quinn, J. (1992). Holding sacred space: The nurse as healing environment. *Holistic Nursing Practice*, 6(4), 26-36.
- Ban Breathnach, S. (1995). *Simple abundance: A daybook of comfort and joy*. New York: Warner Books.

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