CHANGING PERCEPTIONS: USING THEORY GUIDED PRACTICE EDUCATION TO IMPROVE NURSES’ CARING AND UNDERSTANDING

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Introduction: The culture of nursing has shifted over the last few decades from the original theoretical base upon which it was founded. Currently, nursing is subject to the limiting medical nature of managing skills, doing tasks, relying on equipment with very busy staffing ratios and decreasing resources. As a result, many nurses are distracted from the core of nursing practice—caring. The lack of caring science inclusion in practice is reflected in myriad ways throughout many institutions by poor customer satisfaction scores, burnt-out nurses, and low morale. Now, in this time of personal and global demand for caring, health and healing, nurses must return to Caring Science as the theoretical guide to nursing practice.

Significance: From a holistic perspective, for health and healing to occur, all levels of person need to be recognized and cared for to promote the best possible outcome. It takes holistic health practitioners, well educated, with appropriate resources to care for populations effectively. Arguably, professionals practice best when guided by theory creating a window through which to view one’s practice. In nursing, theory is often presented very early in nursing education and infrequently returned to as one enters the practice setting. Caring Science, in a sense, defines the practice of nursing, and therefore nursing professionals need re-education and re-immersion into Caring Science contexts to improve practice and patient outcomes, as well as personal and professional growth.

Purpose: The purpose of this project is to improve theory-guided practice understanding and utilization, specifically in the context of Jean Watson’s Theory of Human Caring (Watson, 2008). It focuses on an eleven-month nursing education implementation to subsequently improve the perceptions of patients’ parents about their nurses’ caring and understanding as reflected in weekly PRC scores (a patient satisfaction scoring system).

Setting and Participants: This project takes place on the Surgical Multidisciplinary Specialties Center (SMSC) at The Children's Hospital, a well respected pediatric hospital in Aurora, CO. The targeted participants are Registered Nurses of varying experience and background. However, all staff, including physical, occupational and speech therapists, physicians, assistants, clinical assistants, and others, are welcome to education sessions, but attendance is not required.

Project Description/Process: This project focuses on educating nurses and the multidisciplinary team about Jean Watson’s Theory of Human Caring (Watson, 2008). Watson’s Caring Theory unfolds 10 Caritas Processes that are integral to caring and healing in practice—individually, interpersonally, within systems, and the universe (Watson, 2008). An eleven month timeline allows for a one month project launch with subsequent months to focus on one Caritas Process in depth and how the process relates to self, other, and system within a practice environment. Within each month, nurses and staff are reached on individual and group levels through education sessions including a combination of poster presentations, pamphlets, and two “lunch &
learn” sessions per month. During the “lunch & learns” the processes are presented to staff in an audio-visual format including text, art, music and dialogue to explore each process thoroughly. In addition, the project leader connects face-to-face with staff, allowing for dialogue about theory-guided practice integration, personal experiences, and about the monthly Caritas Process. The Got HEART committee on the SMSC is a group assisting in implementation of the project. The committee’s purpose and goals include increasing staff satisfaction, monitoring weekly PRC scores, and overall increasing patient and families’ perceptions of excellent care. Using the CAT tool, parents’ perceptions of their nurses caring are surveyed prior to and after implementation of this project. In addition, a PRC score key driver of parents’ perception of their nurses caring will be monitored prior to and after implementation.

Projected Outcomes/Evaluation: The goal of the project is to enhance nursing practice by providing information about Caring Theory as a window through which to view one’s practice. There is no prediction to what degree nurses will comprehend and integrate the Caritas Processes into practice as there is an evolution over time and variances in individual personality and style. However, nurses utilizing the Caritas Processes in their practice reflects to some degree on the unit’s PRC scores, specifically, the key driver “parents’ perceptions of nurses’ caring and understanding.” This score at the present time is an average in the high 60th percentile; the unit goal is a score within or above the 80th percentile. Ideally, there will be a two percent or greater increase after the project completion. An increased score on the CAT tool after implementation of the project is likely.

Future Directions: Nursing faces a huge challenge today to honor the ethical contract we have with society to advocate, to care, and to facilitate healing for our fellow humans and our world-universe. There is little chance that the nursing profession will survive given the current trend toward a mini-medical model unless we lead, teach, and coach each other to return to the root of caring for humanity and ourselves. As this project is a drop of water in an ocean, it is a step to raise the greater awareness and consciousness of the connection we all have. It serves to honor the process of education, consciousness, and intentionality in practice as a way to transform our practice, reflective of the archetypal context nursing holds in society—a light in the darkness.

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Reference: