LOOKING BACK AND MOVING FORWARD: A PERSONAL JOURNEY INTO CARITAS CONSCIOUSNESS

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Introduction: The concept of caring is central to both the discipline and profession of nursing. Albert Einstein Healthcare Network (AEHN) has adopted Watson’s Theory of Human Caring as the philosophical framework for nursing and the professional practice model of care delivery. This is both a story and reflection of my personal journey into Caritas Consciousness from my novice beginnings of trying to clarify and understand the tenets and philosophy of the theory in order to integrate into the practice setting to living and becoming a Caritas Coach.

Significance: Contemporary nursing practice focuses on creating caring environments for nurses, patients, and families within today’s complex healthcare organizations. Theory-guided practice advances both the discipline and profession of nursing. Practice outcomes demonstrate that creation of a caring-healing environment at all levels facilitates both human and environmental well-being (DiNapoli, Nelson, Turkel & Watson, 2010; Watson, 2008). Watson’s theory continues to be advanced in the practice setting as registered nurses transform from a focus on the tasks of nursing to “the practice of loving kindness, authentic presence, cultivation of one’s spiritual practices, and being in the caring-healing environment and allowing for miracles” (Watson, 2008, p. 34).

Purpose: The purpose of this project is to synthesize the various initiatives I created to assist direct care registered nurses on their journey to transform nursing practice from tasks to Caritas Nursing by integrating Watson’s Theory of Human Caring and the Caritas Processes into daily practice.

Setting and Participants: The initial setting was Moss Rehab at Sacred Heart, Allentown, where my unit specific projects began. The caring circle continued to evolve and now includes various medical-surgical and rehabilitation units at Albert Einstein Health Network- Elkins Park. Participants include registered nurses, licensed practical nurses and certified nursing assistants. The setting also takes me from Albuquerque to Orlando to present to rehabilitation professionals at the National Rehabilitation Nurses Conference.

Project Description: Examples of caring projects as my Caritas Consciousness evolves include:
- Creating Caring hands, a Caring Christmas Tree, Caring Calendars and Caring Closets as tangible and visible expressions of Caritas.
- Holding caring dialogues prior to each meeting in order for staff to share caring moments and increase comfort level with the language of the theory and caring.
- Developing individualized Caritas Competencies for registered nurses, licensed practical nurses and nursing assistants.
- Participating in the renewing of caring values through the Nurses’ Week candle lighting Ceremony for 2009 and 2010.
Presenting three posters and one podium presentation at the National Rehabilitation Nurses Conference (2008, 2009, and 2010) on the various initiatives.

Teaching a four-hour Caritas Education once a month using the singing bowl as a modality to center the experience.

Ongoing work with shared governance council to translate the Theory of Human Caring into caring actions.

**Project Outcomes:** Being on this ongoing reflective, inspirational journey as a Caritas Coach is transforming my personal and professional life. On a personal level, I intently focus on the practice of loving kindness to become the caring-healing environment and my friends and family have noticed my inner peace and sense of calmness. On a professional level, the registered nurses are becoming increasingly comfortable with the language of caring and personally, I am recognizing how the theory honors our work and gives voice to nursing.

**Project Evaluation:** Quantitative data from direct care registered nurses attending the formal Caritas Education program is approximately 4.7 on a scale of 5. Qualitative feedback includes “I feel hope and excitement,” “I want to apply this in my nursing practice,” and “makes me think about my nursing practice.” Ongoing enculturation of the Theory of Human Caring is incorporated throughout our network, with the ultimate goal of Magnet recognition, staff living the Theory of Human Caring, and patients cared for in a healing environment.

**Future Directions:** This Caritas Journey continues to grow in so many directions as registered nurses increase awareness, begin using the theory in practice and create caring moments with patients and families. Specific plans include educating non-nursing professionals, therapists, and physicians on the Caritas Processes; developing care plans grounded in the ten Caritas Processes and creating *Getting to Know Me* stories for each patient. My personal journey continues as I try to live the Caritas Processes, as a mentor and role model. The possibilities are endless when I open up to caring from the heart.

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**References:**