INCORPORATING CARING INTO THE RN RESIDENCY PROGRAM THROUGH REFLECTIVE JOURNALING

Maureen Phillips, BSN, RN, OCN
Bon Secours St. Mary’s Hospital, Richmond, Virginia
Maureen_phillips@bshsi.org

Introduction: St. Mary’s hospital Nursing Professional Practice model has caring as a foundation. The care delivery model is based on Jean Watson’s Theory of Human Caring and focuses on caring relationships (Watson, 2008). New graduate nurses are supported through an RN Residency Program, a six month program designed to support and educate new graduate nurses during their first year of nursing. Outcomes for nurses completing the RN Residency Program include having a clear understanding of the professional practice model, the care delivery model, and being able to incorporate the Caritas Processes™ (Watson, 2008) into clinical practice.

Significance: Incorporating caring through reflective journaling activities in the RN Residency program allows new graduate nurses to come to know the unique caring experience of the professional nurse in practicing Caritas Process™ #4, Developing and Sustaining a Helping-Trust, Caring Relationship with self, colleagues, patients, and families (Watson, 2008). Journaling represents an aesthetic way of knowing (Carper, 1978) and the practice of reflection that is associated with journaling increases awareness and understanding of self and other (Wagner 2000, Watson, 2008).

Purpose: The purpose of this project is to use creative expression as a way to teach registered nurses the role of caring within professional nursing practice by introducing reflective journaling exercises in the RN Residency program.

Setting and Participants: Participants for this project include all new graduate registered nurses at St. Mary’s hospital beginning the RN Residency program in May 2012 or later. Each RN Residency group consists of approximately 20 registered nurses from all hospital settings. Each new graduate nurse is entered into the program within three months of employment.

Project Description/Process: The project began with an initial group of nineteen registered nurses in May 2012. On day one of the RN Residency program, each RN was given a notebook to use as a journal and asked to use the journal to write about clinical/caring experiences. Education related to Watson Theory of Human Caring, including the Caritas Processes™, self-care, centering, and five-minute purposeful interaction was presented. The RNs were given a list of the Caritas Processes™ with an assignment to write in their journals over the next month about clinical/caring scenarios they experienced. When the group returned on day two a month later, only two had written in their journal since the previous session. Barriers included being tired after work, having responsibilities at home, and not wanting to think about work at home. For the third day, time was allotted on the agenda for a journaling activity. The nurses were given two questions as guides to initiate their reflective journaling. The group provided feedback that the guides helped and that they appreciated having time during class to work on the journaling. A suggestion on the evaluation was to have a binder for the journal so all the materials from the RN Residency program including journal activities were together.
Programmatic changes were made to the journaling experience for the second group. Binders with dividers were provided instead of notebooks. Dividers were used to create sections for each class, a section for journaling activities, and a section for contact hour certificates. Time to personalize the journals by tracing their hand on a piece of paper and decorating the hand to reflect their qualities as a nurse was part of the experience. The hand was chosen to symbolize how hands are essential to caring practice.

**Project Outcome:** Lessons learned included that (1) nurses need guides to initiate their writing; (2) participation is greater when given time during class to reflect and write, and (3) materials provided for journaling need to be viewed as useful and beneficial. Journaling provided an opportunity for nurses to connect the language of caring science to practice, and sharing of caring moments with others allowed for the development of helping, trusting, caring relationships among peers and program educator.

**Project Evaluation:** Evaluation was done through verbal feedback from the participants and written feedback on evaluation forms. Responses included “enjoyed the experience” and “thinking about situations differently”. A more formal survey will be developed within three to six months to examine the relationship between journaling and caring practices of the registered nurses.

**Future Directions:** Reflective journaling will become a permanent part of the RN Residency program. Future plans include connecting the journaling activities to the Caring Science topics discussed in class and integrating additional aesthetic experiences related to caring in practice.

**Acknowledgements:** I would like to acknowledge and thank:

- Francine Barr, RN, MS, NEA-BC, Vice President and Chief Nursing Officer, Bon Secours St. Mary’s Hospital for her caring, visionary leadership, and support of professional development which has enabled me to participate in CCEP;
- Faith Miller, MSN, RNC-OB, WHNP-BC, Administrative Director of Professional Practice and Education, Bon Secours St. Mary’s Hospital, for her ongoing encouragement and enthusiasm which furthers the practice of professional nursing at St. Mary’s Hospital. Faith has mentored me through this program and encouraged me to grow professionally.
- Marian Turkel, RN, PhD, NEA-BC, my Caring Science mentor, for her ongoing encouragement and thoughtful feedback which enhanced my growth as a Caritas nurse.
- A special recognition to all the nurses who have touched me through my many years of nursing by truly living the caring theory in practice. Some have taught me as I hope to teach others.

**References:**