Intentionality and Caring-Healing Consciousness: A Practice of Transpersonal Nursing

This article explicates some theoretical and scientific dimensions of intentionality and consciousness as a framework for transpersonal nursing. New connections are made between noetic sciences and transpersonal caring theory, both of which cultivate intentionality as a form of focused consciousness as a formal field of study. What emerges is Intentional Transpersonal Caring, whereby intentionality, consciousness, and universal energy-field are posited as the foundation of a caring moment, potentiating healing for both practitioner and patient. The theoretical and scientific are translated into the practical by a series of practice guidelines that activate intentionality into a living theory of transpersonal caring-healing praxis. Key words: caring practice, consciousness, intentionality, noetic sciences, transpersonal caring theory

Jean Watson, PhD, RN, HNC, FAAN
Distinguished Professor of Nursing
Murchinson-Scoville Chair of Caring Science
School of Nursing
University of Colorado Health Sciences Center
Denver, Colorado

Intentions remind us of what is important . . . intention informs our choices and our actions . . . our intentions serve as blueprints, allowing us to give shape and direction to our efforts . . . and our lives . . .

—Kabat-Zinn

. . . thinking related to intentionality connects with the concepts of consciousness, energy . . . if our conscious intentionality is to hold thoughts that are caring, loving, open, kind and receptive, in contrast to an intentionality to control, manipulate, and have power over, the consequences will be significant . . . based on the different levels of consciousness . . . and the energy associated with the different thoughts.

—Jean Watson

In considering the notion of intentionality, we are invited to consider/reconsider a living theory of caring in relation to our conscious living and working. To engage in this topic is to open a new horizon of meaning that embraces notions of noetic sciences as well as transpersonal dimensions of nursing. Both the noetic and the transpersonal evoke notions of consciousness and intentionality as dynamic energetic spirit manifesting transcendent aspects of being and becoming in

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the caring moment. This is a contemporary practice that is mindful and reflective, a practice that is graced with beauty and loving attention to our own and others' humanity. An intentional transpersonal practice emerges that cultivates a caring consciousness and the human spirit as its core, manifesting "wide awake" acts/action.

NOETIC SCIENCES AND TRANSPERSONAL CARING THEORY

Noetic perspective

Noetic comes from the Greek word "nous," which refers to mind or direct ways of knowing. Noetic sciences seek to further explorations of conventional science into aspects of reality, such as mind, consciousness, and spirit, which include intentionality; these noetic aspects of reality include but transcend physical phenomena. This noetic context considers consciousness and the world of inner experience as "a promising contemporary framework within which to carry on fundamental moral inquiry...." (p33) One key aspect of this view is that we participate in co-creating our experiences, which arise from "thoughts as not merely a reflection on or product of reality but also as a movement of that reality itself." (p47) In other words, according to theoreticians and scientists in the field, we are urged to view consciousness (and intentionality) as critical variables, necessitating an expanded model of health and healing. (p51)

In the noetic science field, consciousness and intentionality (as focused consciousness) have become a "focus of experimental research over the past 30 plus years." (p51) This research to date indicates that consciousness can project itself beyond the limitations of the immediate senses. (p4) The proliferation of interest and research in the areas of distant healing, distant intentionality, and subtle energies, as well as the influence of prayer on healing, are exemplars of renewed attention to the noetic. The noetic embraces both matter and spirit as one and invites more extended views of science than we have ever imagined. William James summed up this expanded ontology and worldview by suggesting "potential transcendence of the human spirit within the scientific study of consciousness." (p48)

Transpersonal perspective

A transpersonal perspective is related to noetic views in that both share a common interest in the theoretical concepts of intentionality and consciousness. Both perspectives embrace energy and spirit in their frameworks. Transpersonal refers to values of deep connectedness, of relationship, subjective meaning, and shared humanity. Transpersonal caring theory makes intentionality, as focused caring-healing consciousness, more explicit. Thus, one's intentionality becomes activated through one's conscious focus toward aspects of reality that incorporate, but transcend the physical as the object of attention. Transpersonal conveys a connection beyond the ego, capturing spiritual dimensions all humans share with deeper self, others, nature, and the universe.

In some ways, setting one's intentionality as a focused caring-healing consciousness of connectedness is basic to both transpersonal nursing and to the field of noetic sciences, which is the study of such focused consciousness. Thus, by integrating noetic and transpersonal perspectives, intentionality...
and consciousness become core concepts under a nursing framework of transpersonal caring and healing.

Definition of intentionality

Intentionality is not the same as the word "intention," nor does it mean the same as "good intentions." Rather, the term and concept of intentionality convey a more technical, philosophical meaning referring to a consciousness and awareness that are directed toward a mental object, with purpose and efficacy toward action, expectation, belief, volition, and even the unconscious.5-7

When one declares intentionality toward an object or action, whatever resistance may be within tends to mobilize and dissipate, allowing manifestation of intention to be realized. Intentions do not refer to having a goal-directed outcome in mind, nor a specific purpose for directing another person or situation. Rather, it is cooperating with the field, the emerging order, instead of trying to change it.8 This line of thinking is congruent with contemporary scientific thinking, which incorporates both physical and nonphysical phenomena.7 This integrated view of the noetic and transpersonal posits that one's intentionality and consciousness can connect with a deeper order of possibilities. One's consciousness and intentionality are posited to work within the energetic field of emerging possibilities by manifesting caring-healing consciousness within the moment.

Intentional Transpersonal Caring-Healing

When intentionality and caring consciousness are incorporated into a shared transpersonal framework for nursing practice, one begins to awaken scientifically as well as ethically. Both noetic and transpersonal views validate the importance of one's values-spiritual belief system and focused attention as a conduit to access universal life energy. This broader transpersonal field awareness of intentionality seeks to access the universal, life-spirit energy via manifesting one's deep intentional focus on a specific mental object of attention and awareness. This process invites spirit-energy to enter into one's life and work, and into the caring-healing processes and outcomes.

This transpersonal, universal field view is congruent with contemporary theories of caring, as well as Rogers' science of unitary human beings.8,9 Indeed, Smith reported that the "first constitutive meanings of the concept of caring from the Rogerian unitary perspective is manifesting intentions"8(p21) (emphasis added). In her work, she defined manifesting (caring) intentions as "creating, holding, and expressing thoughts, images, feelings, beliefs, desires, will (purpose), and actions that affirm possibilities for human betterment or well-being."8(p21) Other aspects of expression of (caring) intentions include: "centering on the person, preserving dignity and humanity, commitment to alleviate another's vulnerabilities, providing attention and concern, reverence for each human life, love and co-presence, approaching the other in humility, expressing compassion and courage and being with in authentic presence."8(p21) What emerges is an Intentional Transpersonal Caring-Healing practice model.

This emerging framework of Intentional Transpersonal Caring-Healing unites energy and consciousness. We realize that patterns
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emerge from our practices that are dynamic, energetic, and actually potentiate the caring-healing field in a given moment. It is in this space, which is created through manifesting one's caring intentions, that one witnesses safe space, sacred space, authenticity, commitment, and reverence, cherishing values of love, beauty, peace, and goodness through a purposeful encounter. As Smith points out, during the process of manifesting intentions, one becomes more conscious, deliberate, and focused; related to expanding consciousness of unconditional love; and aware of one's integral nature, that is, one's connectedness with others, the world, and the cosmos.

This emerging interest in intentionality and consciousness also renews some of the esoteric core of religions of all worlds, as well as the perennial wisdom traditions of the ages. This perennial view acknowledges what Aldous Huxley noted as "a divine Reality substantial to the world of things and lives and minds...something similar to...divine Reality." The epistemology, ontology, and experience of focused consciousness and intentionality place humankind and knowledge ultimately in the realm of both the immanent and transcendent, the universal field of energy, consciousness, and spirit.

With such an integration or synthesis of perspectives, we entertain a view whereby health and healing are acknowledged as a relational, energetic process by which individuals maintain their ability to cultivate and manifest deep values, beliefs, and meaningfulness in the midst of suffering and disease. Additional acknowledgment is given to attentiveness, presence, authenticity, personal relationships, perceptions, thoughts, and emotions as fundamental points of connection between consciousness, energy, and unitary theories and science models. This emerging focus on transpersonal caring in nursing, which is directed toward intentions and consciousness as foundational, restores the possibility of human transcendence in the face of illness, disease, suffering, vulnerability, and even death.

Such an Intentional Transpersonal Caring model now incorporates energy and universal spirit and manifests deep values of connectedness and healing. This cultivated view "now becomes primary: a source and form of life energy, life spirit, and vital energy which is connected to the energy of the universe, the universal life energy field." An Intentional Transpersonal Caring perspective becomes foundational for an ethically aware practice, which potentiates healing outcomes. An Intentional Transpersonal Caring model seeks to identify deeper sources of meaning and deeper sources of inner healing, which are defined in more spirit-filled terms than just disease elimination associated with allopathic curing.

Thus, an Intentional Transpersonal Caring field approach to healing practices requires that the practitioner pause to consider his or her own thoughts and actions in daily life. Otherwise, how is one to cultivate intentionality and an authentic caring consciousness that can manifest in one's life
and work? Further, how can one consider such a daunting task?

RECONSIDERING DEEPER/DEEPEST TASKS OF TRANSPERSONAL NURSING

When placing the notion of intentionality and caring consciousness within the context of contemporary and futuristic transpersonal nursing, we are now asked, if not required, to redefine nursing. We do that by considering the ultimate tasks of caring and healing within the intentional transpersonal vision above. Nursing for this new era no longer can be defined by a ranking order of medical procedures and bureaucratic tasks carried out as industrial employees of hospitals/institutions, but rather by inviting concepts such as intentionality, caring consciousness, energy, spirit, and transpersonal into our frameworks. We then hopefully can see that what we thought we were “doing” in conventional, fragmented practice models is not confined to the material world alone, but belongs to something much more profound. We awaken to the fact that our jobs have been too small for the nature and needs of both those we serve and ourselves.

At a deeper level, both nursing and nurses, at least within an Intentional Transpersonal Caring model, acknowledge that the model and we, ourselves, come face to face with humanity itself. Indeed, in this deeper, perhaps deepest view, we reveal that the tasks of humanity itself become the ultimate tasks of nursing and nurses. These ultimate tasks of nursing intersect with the following tasks of humanity (these ideas were influenced by a paper presented on spirituality by C. Longacre in Durham, England, September 1999):

- healing our relationship with self and others
- finding meaning for our own life as we re-awakened our profound compassion and caring for our own spiritual journey
- understanding and transforming our own and others’ suffering
- deepening our understanding and acceptance of all of life cycles (the dark and the light) and preparing for our own death

In revisiting nursing’s ultimate tasks within this expanding transpersonal view, nursing and nurses awaken to the ultimate concerns of humanity itself. In doing so, nurses become true instruments, embodied spirits of caring and healing. What emerges is a new vision of basic nursing practice that embraces caring consciousness, intentionality, and spirit-energy, both from within and from without. A spiritual culture unfolds of nurse-as-instrument, of “nurse as sacred healing environment,” of nurse with intentional presence, engaging with grace, beauty, artistry, and loving energetic attention, not rushing, nor dismissing, nor dribbling away precious energy of healing potential. This perspective allows nursing and nurses to connect with spirit in revitalizing the spirituality in nursing. This holistic view invites a living theory of caring and healing in relation to our own lives and work. In the words of Indian writer-activist Arundhati Roy, it is “vital to de-professionalize the public debate on matters that vitally affect the lives of ordinary people.”

Intentional Transpersonal Caring approaches affect the lives of nurses and the public alike.
TRANSLATING THEORY INTO ACTION: CULTIVATING OUR INTENTIONALITY AND CARING CONSCIOUSNESS

As nurses working within an expanded holistic model that embraces an intentional transpersonal approach to caring and healing, we acknowledge that the tasks of nursing intersect and transform the tasks of humanity itself. We thus are challenged to reexamine our own meaning of intentional and intentional caring practices for self, as well as those we are caring for through times of suffering, despair, vulnerability, and unknowns. Cultivation of such practices elicits and calls upon profound knowledge and skills that touch and draw upon the human heart and soul. The task at hand is greater than conventional medical nursing and physical and emotional nursing care. Indeed, the task in this emerging area of Intentional Transpersonal Caring-Healing invites and evokes the fullest and highest sense of compassionate service—a service that inspires/inspirits one to grow into all of the finest aspects of living and learning a spiritual journey in one’s chosen life’s work and calling.

In translating the transpersonal theory into authentic practice, the mindset becomes one of creating spirit-filled sacredness and reverence around our work. We acknowledge that we are working with our own and another’s life force, energy, spirit—with human life force that has its own inner journey for living and dying. Thus, illness, pain, suffering, despair, distress, vulnerability, birthing, and dying all become an existential-spiritual human dilemma that ultimately each of us shares and must face. Consistent with timeless nursing and our Nightingale roots, we acknowledge that nursing is ultimately a spiritual practice. In acknowledging these ultimate tasks of humanity and nursing, individual nurses and nursing, in general, are offered an opportunity to transform practice through mindful practice as one way forward.

CULTIVATION OF INTENTIONALITY AND CARING CONSCIOUSNESS\textsuperscript{11,13}

Intentionality and setting our intentions within a context of caring consciousness remind us of what is important. Our intentionalities inform our choices and actions, helping us to be sensitive and mindful about what is most important in our lives and work. Intentionality and caring consciousness converge in setting the stage for preparing ourselves for what matters and what our focus is to be, and for reminding us over and over again to return to our intentions in the present, now.

Experienced practitioners of mindfulness and reflective practice remind us that it is never too late to establish this perspective in our lives and work. It means that we begin when we are ready, wherever we are, in our lives and work, in the here and now. Each of us is invited to formulate the intentions that are important to affirm and implement, intentions that are realistic and meaningful to one’s own authentic value system. Not only is it never too late to begin with intentions and mindfulness, but the sages teach us that the very moment we make the conscious, intentional choice and commitment to do so becomes the perfect moment to begin.
IDENTIFY YOUR OWN
INTENTIONS—OPTIONAL
EXEMPLARY EXERCISES TO POINT
THE WAY

So, if and when you are ready, here are some steps and guides for cultivating and activating your intentional caring-healing practice.

- **Intention one**—Upon awakening each day, begin the day with a spiritual practice, even if it is being silent to receive the day and to give gratitude for life. Be open to receive the day and all the universe wishes you to receive and give in return. In this frame of mind, each morning set your intentions for the day; bring your full self, your presence-in-the-moment to your day and to your work, whatever it may be. Establish your intentions about those things you can control, letting go of those you cannot control. Be guided by caring, compassion, tenderness, gentleness, loving kindness, and equanimity for self and others.

- **Intention two**—Honor nursing as the spiritual, spirit-filled practice that it is, keeping in touch with the ancient roots of Nightingale and ancestors across time. Keep this mindfulness and intentionality alive through the use of an invocation, invoking into the space you are in the Divine source and inspiration to guide you. Invoke this higher/deeper spirit, this presence, even if you cannot see or feel it. Trust that universal Spirit resides in our lives and work.

- **Intention three**—Work to cultivate discernment in your daily life and work, using an intentional awareness of the reflection and a return to the “now.” It is the moment-to-moment breath that grounds and orients you to spirit, returning again and again to this intention, this mindfulness of the “eternal now” of infinite spirit. In invoking infinite spirit in the now, you invoke the notion of divine presence in all you meet, hold them in light, bless and forgive them, holding caring-healing energy in your consciousness for both self and other. In this intentional frame, revision your place of work as a temple, a shrine, a sacred site for inner healing, taking personal “spiritual leave” from the industrial, institutional model of sick care, doing so without bias or fear.

- **Intention four**—Make an effort to “see” who the spirit-filled person is behind the patient or colleague. Seek to connect with others beyond the ego to the spirit-to-spirit relation in a caring moment. Offer your authentic presence, even in a brief moment, honoring the inner process that cannot be rushed, fixed, or controlled by your own or other’s expectations. Trust in the ability of self and others to access the healer within.

- **Intention five**—Use whatever presents itself in your life, including the dark and difficult times, as lessons to teach you to grow more deeply into your own humanity. Ask for help and guidance when unsure, confused, and frightened. Forgive and bless each situation, learning to surrender to that which is greater than you, and trusting spirit-filled, loving energy to flow through you for healing.

- **Intention six**—Fold these intentions into your heart and commit yourself to cultivating a practice of these or other heart-felt intentions as best you can, every day. In turn, you are honoring
your own self and your caring consciousness-connection with these ultimate tasks of intentional transpersonal nursing and the universal healing field of possibilities. Extend your consciousness and intentions of caring and healing into your space. By bringing your authentic, intentional caring presence into your work space, you are energetically helping to re-pattern the environment field within that moment.

- **Intention seven**—At the end of the day, offer gratitude for all. Dedicate what you have done to the universe. Bless and forgive all that has entered into the sacred circle of your life and work. Release and dedicate the day to a deeper, higher order of the timeless cycle of the universe and the great circle of life, reminding yourself that you/we all are in the presence of that which is greater than ourselves.

- **One last intention**—Create your own intentions and your own authentic practice to cultivate caring consciousness and meaningful intentionalities. Let these practices serve as your personal guide for your own Intentional Transpersonal Caring-Healing theory in your life and work.

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