CARING FOR THE CAREGIVER: INCORPORATING WATSON’S THEORY OF HUMAN CARING INTO THE ICU SETTING.

Marybeth Baber, RN, BSN
Chesapeake Regional Medical Center

Introduction: Low employee satisfaction scores and high turnover rate are key indicators that the (Intensive Care Unit) ICU staff is well on their way towards burnout, as these figures are similar to other published studies (Verdon, Merlani, Perneger, & Ricou, 2008). Incorporating Watson’s Caritas Process 8 will allow the ICU staff to have a personal environment of healing while facilitating the individual’s personal transformation in becoming the healing environment.

Significance: Burnout has been described as a psychological syndrome composed of three elements: “(1) emotional exhaustion or a general wearing out from the job, (2) depersonalization or a negative shift in responses to others, particularly clients, and (3) a decreased sense of personal accomplishment” (Miller, Zook & Ellis, 1989). Some of the consequences of burnout are lower levels of satisfaction, increased interpersonal conflict, and absenteeism (Verdon, Merlani, Perneger, & Ricou, 2008). Caring for the caregiver allows the nurse to regenerate and renew in order to provide caring as well as strength during times of stress.

Purpose: As the efficiency in caring for patients is directly tied to the well being of nurses (Verdon, Merlani, Perneger, & Ricou, 2008), this researcher hypothesizes that caring for the caregiver will ultimately improve patient care and patient satisfaction in the ICU. Additionally employee satisfaction and retention will improve.

Setting and Participants: The clinical setting chosen for implementing Jean Watson’s Theory is a 14 bed ICU located within an independent community hospital. Nursing administration has decided to focus attention on the ICU nursing staff and the unit environment with a goal to assist the staff to become more self aware and in tune to their inner self.

Project Description: Using Lewin’s Change Model as a guide, ICU staff will be taken through the change process to unfreeze current processes, create change, and then refreeze those processes by incorporating Watson’s techniques into daily practice.

According to Watson (2008), in Caritas Process 8 a healing environment is created at all levels. Environment takes on the meaning whereby the nurse is in the environment but also becomes, or is, the environment (Watson, 2008).

Project Outcomes: Project planning and coordination began in December 2008 however organization bureaucracy and job related priorities for the Caritas Coach slowed implementation significantly. Therefore the project outcome is pending as of the writing of this abstract.
Challenges for implementation included (1) obtaining permission to use Caring Efficacy Scale (CES) (2) obtaining permission to deviate from organizational paint color schemes for the staff areas (3) time constraints to devote to the project (4) funding for the staff hours, renovation supplies and labor and, (5) poor return of pre-implementation CES.

**Project Evaluation:** The refreezing phase will incorporate the following tools to measure success: (1) staff and patient satisfaction scores, (2) employee turnover rate, and (3) NDNQI scores. Monthly follow up with the staff and unit manager will be ongoing.

**Future Directions:** Techniques learned from this implementation project will be evaluated to determine the feasibility of expanding the project out to other departments. Expansion into patient areas will also be evaluated with attention to keeping lights and noise level low, keeping the patient area neat and clean, and encouraging family members to bring in personal items to beautify and personalize the patient’s room.

**Acknowledgements:** Thank you to Elaine Griffiths, CNO for her vision of the benefit of incorporating Dr. Watson’s theory through Caritas Coaches into the Chesapeake Regional Medical Center (CRMC) nursing department. Thank you to Joanna Fernandez-Rosacia RN, my CRMC partner in the first cohort of Caritas Coaches. Joanna has been a great support and role model. Thank you to Lisa Jackson, RN, ICU Nurse Manager who opened her mind and her unit to the idea of being a focus for this Caritas Coaching project. Finally, thank you to my husband Randy and son Will for lending support with understanding and love throughout the Caritas Coaching journey, which promises to be a life changing and life long experience.

**References**

