CREATING A HEALING ENVIRONMENT: 
PROMOTING A POST ANESTHESIA CARING UNIT

Joyce Bodine, BSN, RN, CPAN
Monmouth Medical Center, Long Branch, N.J.
jbodine@barnabashealth.org

Introduction: As the Magnet journey continues for Monmouth Medical Center with Jean Watson’s Theory of Human Caring providing our nursing framework, the need to incorporate Caring Science in individual nursing units was realized. The Post Anesthesia Care Unit (PACU), with its frequent contact with various nursing units on a daily basis, is the ideal entity to serve as an example of a caring-healing environment for the entire hospital. Nurses, patients, and visitors are greatly influenced by the hospital experience and a unit with compassion, love and caring can transform a stressful event into a positive encounter for all involved.

Significance: The vulnerable and dependent nature of the PACU patient demands that Caritas Process™ 8: Creating a Healing Environment at All Levels, be met concomitantly during the brief but intensive portion of their surgical experience. The focus of this Caritas Process™, with the need for comfort, safety, privacy, human dignity, clean aesthetic surroundings, and the nurse as the Caritas environment, is of the utmost importance to both patient and nurse in this critical period (Watson, 2008). Thus, the caring consciousness and intentionality set in this unit will result in positive effects hospital-wide, including visitors, volunteers, and non-nursing personnel (i.e.-the medical staff).

Purpose: The purpose of this project is to integrate Caring Science through the formation of a healing environment in the PACU. New meaning is given to our existence and work by exploring “how our unique gifts, talents, and skills can be translated into compassionate human caring-healing service for self and others” (Watson, 2008, pg. 41). Therefore, post-anesthesia care can transform into post-anesthesia caring and benefit not only patients, but also enhance the life of the staff, visitors, and all who are in contact with the Caritas field.

Setting and Participants: Located in central New Jersey, Monmouth Medical Center is a 337-bed teaching hospital with a 13-bed main Post Anesthesia Care Unit. The participants include the PACU nursing staff, administration, and waiting room volunteers, which comprise approximately 25 people.

Project Description/Process: Foremost, the process of creating a healing environment at all levels involved introducing the staff to the Caritas Processes™ and the Caritas language through a unit poster and presenting a Process monthly. Self-care practices
including meditation, reflective journaling, and breathing were launched. A self-care 
basket raffle was conducted in the PACU with written caring moments used as entries. 
These were later used as the first submissions in personal reflective journals. A caring 
comments board was started to foster gratitude and appreciation for co-workers. A power 
point presentation, *Create a Healing Environment*, was given on the unit. The PACU 
physical environment was enhanced with meditative music and colorful, nature 
photography. The caring-healing environment was extended to the visitor waiting 
area with the introduction of plants and a visitor comfort basket. With the help of the 
volunteers who manage the waiting area, items such as children’s reading and coloring 
books, magazines, cards, adult puzzles, inspirational books, and comfort teas were 
offered to visitors to enhance the hospital experience and extend the caring environment.

**Project Outcomes(s)/Projected Outcomes:** The project is intended to establish a caring 
culture and healing environment in the PACU that will spread to other units and the entire 
hospital. It is hoped that HCAPHS scores will improve with positive feedback and 
encouraging comments to relay to the staff. Also, it is intended that the staff will benefit 
from continued self-care, improved job satisfaction, and experience a renewed fulfillment 
and meaning in their sacred work of nursing.

**Projected Evaluation:** Formal evaluations have not been conducted at the present. 
Informal comments have been optimistic. A visit from a former director of the unit 
revealed a feeling of positive energy and well-being in the unit that was not perceived 
previously. Many have commented on the mental uplift experienced by the photographs 
of nature scenes now present in the PACU. Mainly, staff has voiced positive comments 
on the introduction of self-care in their lives and changes in the unit’s environment, both 
physically and mentally.

**Future Directions:** The Post Anesthesia Care Unit will continue to use the Theory of 
Human Caring as the framework to sustain and further the healing environment in the 
PACU on all levels. Guidance and coaching will be provided to other nursing units 
aspiring to replicate any or all of the methods used in this project. The Theory will also 
continue to be spread hospital-wide by the Holistic Council as part of the Shared 
Governance Council.

**Acknowledgements:** I would like to thank and acknowledge Diann Johnston, MSN, RN, 
CNO, Monmouth Medical Center, for her unfailing support of Caring Science and her 
belief in the value of Caritas Coaches in the hospital. I would also like to thank Margaret 
Laggner, MSN, RN, for sparking my interest in Caring Science and her confidence and 
personal inspiration in my journey. Thanks also to my wonderful Caritas mentor, 
Marialena Murphy, MSN, MSHA, RN, for her insight and guidance. She truly coaches 
and leads by example. I would like to offer my special gratitude to my fellow members 
of the Holistic Council and the PACU staff and administration for their belief in me and 
their openness to embrace a truly caring-healing environment.
References: