

# Caring science: The heart of NP practice

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In today's fast-paced, complex health care environment, nurse practitioners (NPs) are called to do more than diagnose and treat; they are called to heal. At the core of this healing mission is caring science, a philosophy and praxis that elevates NP practice into a humanistic art. Caring science is essential. It shapes how NPs engage with patients, families, and communities and serves as the foundation of holistic, ethical, and transformative care.

Caring science is not a single theory but a constellation of frameworks that illuminate the heart of nursing. It is grounded in evidence and theory, yet it is deeply intuitive in its application. Among these, Mayeroff's Theory of Caring offers a view of caring as a dynamic, intentional exchange of energy.<sup>1</sup> It is helping the other to grow. For NPs, this means being fully engaged emotionally, spiritually, and physically with each person. Mayeroff reminds us that healing begins with presence and that our attention and intention can profoundly influence outcomes. In every encounter, NPs have the power to shift the energy toward healing simply by how they show up.

Roach's Six Attributes of Caring—the 6 Cs—are Compassion, Competence, Confidence, Conscience, Commitment, and Comportment.<sup>2</sup> They provide a moral and professional compass for NP practice. These are not abstract ideals; they are lived values. Compassion compels us to alleviate suffering and promote healing. Competence ensures safe, effective care. Confidence builds trust. Conscience guides ethical decisions. Commitment sustains us through adversity. And comportment reflects dignity, respect, and integrity. Together, these Cs shape the character and conduct of advanced practice nursing, reminding NPs that how we care is just as important as what we do.

Anne Boykin and Savina Schoenhofer's theory of Nursing as Caring reinforces the belief that all persons are caring by virtue of their humanness.<sup>3</sup> For NPs, this means recognizing and nurturing the caring within each person and oneself. Boykin and Schoenhofer challenge hierarchical models of care, advocating for mutuality, where both the nurse and patient grow through the caring relationship. This is especially vital in advanced practice, where NPs serve not only as clinicians, but also as educators, mentors, and advocates. In every role, caring becomes the thread that connects and elevates our work.

Jean Watson's Theory of Human Caring adds spiritual and philosophical depth.<sup>4</sup> Her Caritas Processes invite NPs to move beyond task-oriented care and embrace the

sacredness of the nurse-patient relationship. Through loving-kindness, authentic presence, and deep listening, Watson's framework encourages NPs to co-create healing environments that honor vulnerability and foster genuine connection. In moments of crisis, grief, or uncertainty, these principles guide NPs to be a steady, compassionate presence.

Caring science is deeply practical and aligns with core NP competencies including patient-centered care, cultural humility, clinical reasoning, and advocacy. Whether managing chronic illness, navigating end-of-life conversations, or supporting trauma survivors, caring science helps NPs see beyond the diagnosis and engage the whole person.

Research supports the impact of caring science. Patients who feel cared for report higher satisfaction, better adherence, and improved outcomes. For NPs, caring science fosters resilience and professional fulfillment. In a time when burnout and moral distress are widespread, caring science offers a path to reconnect with purpose and meaning.

As educators and leaders in our communities, NPs must also champion caring science in curricula, mentorship, and policy. We have the responsibility and opportunity to model caring behaviors, create healing environments, and advocate for systems that honor the dignity of patients and providers.

Caring science is essential. It is what allows NPs to bring their full selves to the bedside, the clinic, the classroom, and the boardroom. It transforms clinical expertise into compassionate healing.

Let's recommit to caring science not just as a theory to be studied, but as a way of being. Live it. Teach it. Lead with it. Caring is not just what we do. It is who we are. 

## REFERENCES

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