

What is “Holistic Nursing”?

Which of the following is a holistic nurse...a nurse practitioner working in an academic cancer center, a staff nurse in a long-term care facility, a nurse educator, a wellness coach, a neonatal intensive care clinical nurse specialist, a stress management consultant, a geriatric case manager, a pediatric nurse? Who is the holistic nurse? All of them!

The American Association of Holistic Nurses defines holistic nursing as “all nursing practice that has healing the whole person as its goal” (American Holistic Nurses’ Association, 1998, Description of Holistic Nursing¹). Many of us entered the nursing profession with this goal in mind, but somehow through specialization, increased work load and technical demands we have diverged from this original goal. As increased specialization has occurred in healthcare, patients are seen as a number of parts, without much attention paid to the whole person. We, as human beings, are much more than the sum of our parts, and are much more than the particular diagnosis by which we are defined by the health care system. The practice of holistic nursing seeks to care for the total human being: body, mind and spirit, by recognizing the dynamic interconnectiveness of these domains. Florence Nightingale, the mother of modern nursing, is considered to be one of the first holistic nurses. She believed that care should be focused on unity, wellness and the interrelationship of human beings and their environment. The philosophy of caring for the total human being is the essence of holistic nursing and for that reason it can be practiced in multiple care settings. Many nurses who embrace holistic concepts of care work in acute care settings, while others may be community based or have their own private practice. Holistic nurses integrate complementary or integrative modalities into their plan of care, recognizing that the healing process involves helping to facilitate and honor the individual patient's values and beliefs about health and illness.

Holistic nursing received specialty designation in 2006 when it was officially recognized by the American Nurses Association² as a defined nursing specialty. Like other nursing specialties, holistic nursing has its own body of knowledge, standards of practice, and evidence based research; but unlike other specialties holistic nursing calls upon nurses to integrate self-care, reflection, and the healing process in their own lives as they care for patients. The holistic nurse recognizes the interconnectedness of health and illness and strives to facilitate healing the body, mind and spirit at any point along the life spectrum. Holistic nursing has been called the heart and science of nursing. I am pleased to call myself a holistic nurse and have been board certified in holistic nursing since 2006.

An active professional organization, the American Holistic Nurses Association (AHNA), has an informative website (www.ahna.org) with more information about the specialty of holistic nursing, resources and information about board certification in the specialty. The ANHA hosts an annual convention, as well as facilitates local networking groups for nurses interested in holistic nursing.

Return to the heart of nursing, become a holistic nurse.

American Holistic Nurses Association. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.ahna.org/AboutUs/WhatIsHolisticNursing/tabid/1165/Default.aspx>

American Nurses Association. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.nursingworld.org/>

About the author:

Pamela Katz Ressler, RN, BSN, HN-BC is the founder and president of Stress Resources in Concord, Massachusetts, a firm specializing in stress management and holistic healthcare consulting for healthcare providers, community organizations, businesses, and individuals. Pam is a nationally certified holistic nurse, and has worked with individuals throughout the life span (from pediatrics through geriatrics) with tools of stress resiliency. She is an adjunct faculty member at UMass Boston in the College of Nursing and Health Sciences, and serves as a consultant on a federal grant addressing stress management for new nursing graduates. Pam is a frequent contributor to various print and online journals, and has just released her first CD entitled ***Opening the Door to Meditation***. Her interest in stress resiliency stems from her 30 years of work in the healthcare industry, but more importantly from her own life as a mother, wife, daughter, sister, aunt, friend, business owner, educator, community volunteer, etc, etc, etc...and her attempt to find balance, sanity, and joy amidst the mess, chaos, and beauty of life. Pam welcomes your comments and emails at www.StressResources.com