



Position on the Role of Nurses in the Practice of Complementary & Integrative Health Approaches (CIHA)

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Overview

Holistic care refers to approaches and interventions that address the needs of the whole person: body, mind, emotion and spirit. Healing arts are those interventions that foster an individual's healing process; a return of the individual toward a state of wholeness in which body, mind, emotional spirit are integrated and balanced, and the person is able to reach deeper levels of personal understanding. Healing does not equate to curing, although they can be synchronous. The nursing profession has a long history of caring for individuals in a holistic manner and integrating the healing arts with conventional treatments. Prior to the famous works of Florence Nightingale of England in the 1850s, American nurses were already renowned for holistic approaches to care in their sickroom management, which is today referred to as creating an optimal healing environment. These optimal healing environments consider touch, light, aromatics, empathetic listening, music, quiet reflection, and similar healing measures as essential ingredients to good nursing care. Today's education of holistically trained registered nurses and advanced practice nurses is built upon these same principles.

The American Holistic Nurses' Association (AHNA) is a professional specialty nursing association dedicated to the promotion of holism and healing. The AHNA believes that nurses enter therapeutic partnerships with clients, their families, and their communities to serve as facilitators in the healing process. This partnership begins with being mindfully aware and fully present in all interactions at work and in life. The holistic nursing care process supported by AHNA is one in which nurses abide by the following commitments:

Acquire and maintain current knowledge and competency in holistic nursing practice. This may include integrating complementary and integrative therapies into that nursing practice.

Provide care and guidance to persons through nursing interventions and therapies consistent with evidence-based research findings and other sound evidence.

Embrace a professional code of ethics and healing that seeks to preserve wholeness and dignity of self and others.

Engage in self-care.

Develop continual growth and personal awareness of his or her own unique capacity to serve as an instrument of healing.

Recognize each person as a whole: body-mind-spirit.

Practice mindful presence in all interactions.

Assess clients holistically, using traditional nursing concepts and incorporating therapeutic communication to identify a broader scope of factors that are potential contributors to increased stress.

Create a plan of care in collaboration with clients and their significant others that is consistent with cultural background, health beliefs, sexual orientation, values, and preferences focusing on health promotion, recovery, restoration, or peaceful dying while maintaining an optimal level of personal independence for as long as possible.

Realizing the recent change in name of the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) to the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH), nurses as patient advocates need to be familiar with the terminology to support health literate decisions by patients. NCCIH defines “complementary” as a practice used together with conventional medicine; “alternative” refers to a non-mainstream practice used in place of conventional medicine. “Integrative” health care, involves the coordination of conventional and complementary approaches. (<https://nccih.nih.gov/health/integrative-health>). The change from a focus on Alternative Medicine to Integrative Health further supports the role of holistic nurses, who have long been champions of Integrative Health.

Nursing, Complementary and Integrative Health

The AHNA believes that inherent in the nursing role is the ability to assess, plan, intervene, evaluate, and perform preventive, supportive, and restorative functions of the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual domains. Therefore, it is expected that the nurse integrates principles and techniques of conventional, complementary and alternative practices, that these are within the scope of nursing practice and that this is holistic nursing care.

AHNA supports the integration of complementary and alternative therapies into conventional health care to enable the client to benefit from the best of all treatments available. In their provision of holistic care, nurses employ practices and therapies from complementary, alternative and conventional medicine, thus creating integrative health care.

Consistent with conventional nursing practice, nurses must be competent in the integrative therapies and practices they employ. The AHNA believes nurses integrate these practices into conventional care as part of their holistic practice. In addition, nurses support and assist clients with their use of integrative health interventions provided by other practitioners by:

Identifying the need for complementary and alternative interventions

Assisting clients in locating providers of those services

Facilitating the use of integrative health care through education, counseling, coaching and other forms of assistance

Coordinating the use of integrative health care in collaboration with various health care providers

Evaluating the effectiveness of clients' integrative health care

AHNA Position Statement on Complementary & Integrative Health Approaches (CIHA)

The AHNA believes that although selected Complementary and Integrative Health Approaches (CIHA) are appropriate interventions for use by nurses, the use of these interventions must be integrated into a comprehensive holistic nursing practice. However, practicing within a holistic nursing framework does not imply competency in effective and safe use of CIHA. Nurses are responsible for gaining additional education and experience and demonstrating clinical competency in all interventions they use in their nursing practice.

A nurse practicing as a therapist of a specific conventional therapy or CIHA must have the education, skills and credentials ascribed for that therapy. The nurse also must operate within the legal scope of practice of the nurse's licensure and jurisdiction.

AHNA views nurses as being in a unique position to implement CIHA throughout the health care system in that registered nurses:

- Represent the greatest number of health care professionals, representing more than 3.2 million health care professionals, and are employed in more diverse clinical settings than any other health care professional

- Are uniquely prepared to differentiate normality from illness, provide interventions for health promotion and illness-related care, and use a wide range of medical technology and healing arts

- Are advocates for clients rather than specific products or practices, therefore are in an excellent position to assure appropriate and adequate use of all types of services

- Are trusted and held in high esteem by consumers

These factors support nurses holding a leadership role in the implementation of CIHA in various service settings and the coordination of CIHA used by clients as part of an integrated approach to health

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Reference

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