Graduate nursing education provides an opportunity for educators to create caring, healing, and learning communities designed to afford graduates a solid foundation as they enter into roles in advanced practice. Whether practicing in a clinical role (e.g., APHN, CNS, NP, CRNA, CNM), or as an educator, researcher, or administrator, graduate nurses must be prepared to integrate the philosophical, theoretical, ethical, and moral dimensions of nursing into the knowledge and research traditions that inform their practice. Advanced practice nurses must be cognizant and versed in the regulatory and licensure requirements of their role. At times, the rules might seem to be complex and confusing, pulling educators and students in many directions. This need not, however, be the case. Taking a moment to remember that the profession of nursing is grounded in holism, and that nurses are experts in the science of health and wellness, provides a refreshing breath of hope and illuminates a path of possibilities for nursing educators.

The call for curriculum revolution from reductionist, empirical paradigms to pedagogies that integrate technical competence into nursing’s values and ethic of whole person care began in the 1980s (Hills & Watson, 2011). Bevis, Moccia, Munhall, Roach, Tanner, and Watson are among the early nursing scholars who led this charge as an imperative in transforming nursing education. Yet today, some 30 years later, we continue to struggle with the inclusion of humanistic, caring/healing content – the philosophy of holism – which is nursing. Educators are continually challenged to weave holism into a curriculum that is primarily focused on biomedicine. What brings us to this place?
Challenges & Detours
Hills and Watson (2011) posit that there have been three major “detours along the way” (p. 4) in the transformation of nursing curricula. The notion that nursing is an art and a science has resulted in a false dichotomy in which the art is caring and the biomedical knowledge is science. This belief is reinforced by attitudes of singular rational – quantifiable and control approaches to illness. In truth, one might view “arts/science” as a unified approach to health and wellness in which nurses envision creative, integrative strategies to promote health.

A second detour suggested by Hills and Watson (2011) is the ongoing challenges within the relationship between nursing and medicine – one that they describe as “ambivalent, tormented” (p. 6). While both professions have a knowledge base, they are not the same. The focus of medicine is on curing disease, whereas nursing is centered on health and wellness, and caring for people who are experiencing any number of health challenges. Nursing curricula is still deeply engrained in medical science and care. It is suggested that both professions need each other’s wisdom and that it would be beneficial to cultivate respectful, shared, and complementary relationships.

Finally, the evidence-based movement is thought to further the challenges of transforming nursing curricula. While there is no question regarding the importance of evidence in the practice of nursing, Hills and Watson (2011) remind us that it is essential we “develop ways of revealing evidence that are consistent with the philosophical and theoretical foundation of a mature discipline and profession distinct from, but complementary to, medicine and all health professions” (p. 10). Nurses must be able to search for meaningful evidence based on the questions they want answered and not limited to a belief that one research method is of paramount importance.

In addition to these detours, nurse educators are met with increasing regulatory demands on content required within the curriculum. Other challenges include:

- healthcare system expectations of the graduate advanced practice nurse,
- consumer desire for quality education in the shortest time, and
- the shift to online course delivery.

In addition to being experts in the science of health and wellness, nurses graduating with an advanced degree must be able to clearly articulate and build a practice based on that worldview. What is the best way to do this? How can we ensure that holism is the foundation of every nursing curriculum? What resources are available to guide faculty on this journey? Perhaps the answer lies in weaving these “outside” forces into a philosophy of holism. For the graduate faculty at Capital University in Columbus, Ohio, this shift in approach was a turning point in the development and revision of graduate nursing programs. 

Key Holistic Concepts for Nursing Curriculum
Graduate education in the Capital University School of Nursing is approached from a holistic paradigm that integrates unitary and biomedical science.

**Holistic self-development:** This concept is introduced in the first course, guiding students to explore ways to nurture and care for self through intentional practices of mindfulness, quieting, self-reflection, self-awareness, and behaviors that promote personal health and wellness. Through peer coaching, students support each other, assisted by faculty.

**Reflective practice:** This is the foundation for all course and clinical experiences. According to Johns (2009), “reflection is living through our everyday experiences towards realizing one’s vision of desirable practice as a lived reality…it is a critical and reflective process of self-inquiry and transformation of being and becoming the practitioner you desire to be…” (p. 3). Through journaling, students are invited to reflect upon and within experiences as they deepen their holistic nursing practice. Guided questions create opportunities for students to consider different ways of knowing as they transform knowledge into understanding and meaning.

**Holistic communication:** These skills are strengthened through activities designed to cultivate intention, presence, listening, and respectfully meeting people where they are. Within nursing coursework, students become competent with a variety of skills and learn to make clinical judgments based on a holistic analysis of evidence and the individual context for each patient.

**Interdisciplinary engagement:** Knowledge and understanding of other disciplines is seminal in creating a broadened lens through which to view the world. The graduate curriculum includes required courses from other schools (e.g., business, theology, law) depending upon the student’s area of focus. Other required core courses are taught or co-taught by professionals outside of nursing. Students complete a variety of scholarly activities with members of the college community from other disciplines, learning more about each other and the importance of building relationships.
Graduate education in the Capital University School of Nursing is approached from a holistic paradigm that integrates unitary and biomedical science (Shields & Stout Shaffer, 2016). This model represents an integrated worldview of nursing that creates an equal understanding and appreciation for both the unitary and biomedical aspects and does not elevate either one to a position of dominance. The faculty embrace the core values of holistic nursing as fundamental tenets within the discipline of nursing. Course development is informed by:

- The Essentials of Masters Education for Professional Nursing Practice (AACN, 2011),
- The Holistic Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice, 2nd Edition (AHNA & ANA, 2013),
- The Core Essentials for the Practice of Advanced Holistic Nursing AHN-BC and APHN-BC (AHNCC, 2012), and
- other resources in the student’s area of study.

Curricular threads provide a unifying framework for all didactic and experiential activities in the graduate nursing program (see box on p. 9). The goal is to provide graduates with a solid foundation in holism so that they are able to articulate the importance of this philosophy, bring their caring presence into the diverse world of health care, and, ultimately, contribute to healthcare transformation.

**Developing a Curriculum: Thoughts on Courses**

While all graduate programs have unique strengths, a curriculum grounded in holism that meets regulatory criteria must include courses developed from a holistic paradigm. Students can be introduced to unitary and biomedical science and holistic values, principles, and caring concepts in an entry philosophy course. Core courses should include, at a minimum, nursing theory, informatics, ethics, health policy and advocacy, and research/evidence-based nursing practice. Many programs require the 3 ‘Ps’: Physical Assessment, Pathophysiology,
and Pharmacology. Taught holistically, assessment includes cultivating skills in biopsychosocial, spiritual, cultural, energetic, relationship, and community dimensions – whole person assessment. Pathophysiology is explored through the lens of health and wellness, recognizing that people are their own best source of information (M. Erickson, personal communication, January 21, 2016). Rather than caring for a disease, holistic nurses care for the whole person who is experiencing a life event. Epigenetics and psychoneuroimmunology are key course constructs. Pharmacology might be better thought of as “pharmacotherapeutics,” including the wide variety of agents used by people to enhance their health (e.g., herbs, supplements, drugs). Track (concentrate) courses, such as education, CNS and management, focus on the specific goals of the student as they develop expertise as advanced holistic nurses. The entirety of the educational program arises from the philosophy of holism.

**Investing Today in Tomorrow’s Future**

Nursing educators live in a time of exciting opportunities and complex challenges. It is time to transform our current “sick-care” system to one that is truly grounded in health and wellness. Advanced practice nurses are integral to this shift and must be prepared to speak clearly and respectfully. Their presence must be sought and represented in all matters of health; their contributions to the healthcare team must be appreciated and valued. The knowledge, skills, and competencies of holistic nursing practice must be the “DNA” of every nurse.

Sixteenth century poet John Heywood wrote that “Nothing is impossible to a willing heart.” The transformation begins with nursing education – the developing of compassionate presence and core strength, resilience, and wisdom needed to build up the next generation of holistic nurses. Educators are called to create holistic graduate nursing programs that stand the test of time. Compassion and equanimity...let it be! Today is the day for holism to be in the forefront. Together we can change everything. Will you join us?

**REFERENCES**


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