All of these nurses have learned the value of the arts in their lives, helping them process difficult nursing experiences, and finding restorative energy to deal with daily life. Anthropologist Ellen Dissanayake (1995) has studied the history of the arts in human evolution and notes how the arts have been around since very early human history, especially in times of transition when much chaos and anxiety can occur. Because today’s nurses are witnesses to the many life transitions and chaotic moments in our patients’ lives, connecting with art provides us with a historical and evolutionary activity designed to promote health and healing.

Nurses often appreciate the value of creative expressive arts in health care. Wilson, Bungay, Munn-Giddings, and Boyce (2016) reviewed 27 studies of art interventions done in healthcare settings and found the majority of healthcare staff had positive opinions of the benefits of these interventions. Yet, many of us refrain from engaging in artistic activities ourselves because we think that one must have special talents or skills to do art, or need lots of time or special supplies. A powerful self-care tool for nurses, connecting to art doesn’t have to be complicated or take a lot of time. In fact, it can be as simple as purposefully listening to music on the way to work or visiting an art gallery.

Types of Connections to Art
Engagement with the arts can occur in several ways. Art therapy uses prescribed artistic activities by a professional therapist trained in one or more of the arts and in mental health as well. The therapist selects the art activity to help a person achieve certain goals. For example, a music therapist might help a patient with a stroke work on certain word pronunciations through song, or an art therapist might have a person draw a specific image and then together they talk about the story behind the drawing.

However, for everyday use, engagement with the arts is often divided into art-looking and art-making. When we go to a concert, play, or gallery, pick up a book of poems or short stories, or listen to music on our headphones, we are on the receiving end of an art experience designed to inspire and heal. When we use the arts in our daily lives, we are actively participating in the healing power of creativity.
artist who is sharing his or her creative energy with us, taking our imaginations to different times and places. Often called art-looking, I like to call these activities art-sensing, because we may be using more than just our eyes to take in the art.

As its name implies, art-making is actually doing art. Sometimes the terms expressive arts or creative arts are used interchangeably for art-making. True expressive art activities are focused primarily on the process of doing art, and less so on what a final piece will be like. These art activities are often independent of artistic training, skills, or talents, although sometimes we do have some background in them. Art-making and art-sensing can also be independent of memory skills. For example, the ability to transcend time and place through art holds true for people with dementia. The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City has developed an extensive “Meet Me” program for persons with dementia and their caregivers. One activity involves guided tours of selected artworks, often provided when the museum is normally closed; other museums around the world now offer similar tours (MoMA, n.d.). But even more accessible are the many normally closed; other museums around the world now offer tours of selected artworks, often provided when the museum is tours of selected artworks, often provided when the museum is closed; other museums around the world now offer similar tours (MoMA, n.d.). But even more accessible are the many examples of paintings, photographs, and sculptures developed into guided art engagement modules that anyone can download free from the MoMA website for use in their home, community, or healthcare setting (www.moma.org/meetme/modules). One of 12 available modules is called “Images of America,” which includes a reprint of the painting “Gas” by Edward Hopper (1940) of an old rural gas station. Viewers can address such questions as “What elements of the landscape are familiar to you?” The art-making activity involves creating a collage of one’s home town while growing up.

Engaging Students in Art-Making
I have taught courses on the use of the arts in health care for more than a decade now. In each course, I ask students to select one activity from Table 1, which is a list of various art-making activities that students have engaged in over the years. Students then spend 2-3 hours per week for four weeks doing the activity and reflecting on the various biopsychosocial responses described below.

A biopsychosocial approach is needed because the arts can affect us in so many different ways. Students are often surprised by their own responses and how these responses can vary and overlap from one time to the next. Karpavičiūtė and Macijauskiene (2016) found similar overlapping results in an intervention group of 56 nurses who did silk-painting once a week at work for 10 weeks: the intervention had “… a positive impact on their general health and mental well-being, reducing stress and fatigue, awakening creativity, and increasing a sense of community at work,” unlike those in the control group. In my classes, more than 85% of students note their positive responses in their final reflections, and more than 70% state they look forward to continuing further engagement with one or more art activities after the course is over.

Which art activities are you already involved in now? Which have you used in the past? Which ones interest you to pursue further? If in the past you have not had a positive response to doing a specific art activity, try selecting a different one that may be more suitable to your current interests and life needs.

Possible Responses to Doing Art-Making
We can decide how helpful any particular art activity is in our own life by doing the following assessment.

Cognitive responses – Both positive and negative thoughts can pervade our minds while engaging in art activities. While a number of people have thoughts about how they could be better at doing an art activity, do you mostly have positive thoughts? Are you enjoying the process and looking forward to seeing how your art develops? Or is there a lot of negative self-talk going on like “This is so bad,” or “What a waste of time”?

Emotional responses – How we respond emotionally is often the primary reason why we connect with or abandon a particular art activity. Sometimes we want to feel a certain way, so pursue an art activity to help us accomplish this. Other times, we want to process the emotions we are feeling. For example, the kind of music we listen to often helps us change our emotions (a
Table I: Art-Making Activities Done by Nurses in an RN to BSN Program

**Activities that involve music**

**Instruments** ........... playing an instrument by one’s self, often in a private setting
playing with others in a jam session, band, or orchestra

**Singing** .................. singing for one’s own enjoyment around the house or in the car
singing with others, like at karaoke or in a singing group

**Dancing** ................. so many choices! e.g., aerobics, hip-hop, salsa, swing, ballroom, ballet

**Activities that use words a lot**

**Writing** ................. personal journal or diary
stories, novels, poetry, multimedia works

**Acting** .................... drama or theatre group, or as a clown or mime

**Making 2-dimensional objects**

**Coloring** ............... child or adult coloring books, sketch pads

**Drawing** ................. pencil, ink, crayon, charcoal, henna sketches
fashion designs, mandalas, calligraphy

**Paintings** ............... watercolors, pastels, acrylics, oils

**Photography** ............. pictures of nature, family, friends, places one has visited
scrap-booking in an album or on a computer
collages with photos or pictures from magazines or computer generated

**Making 3-dimensional objects**

**Baking, cooking** ........ special meals or foods apart from regular cooking duties

**Fibers** ..................... weaving, basketry, needlepoint, embroidery
quilting, sewing, knitting, crocheting,

**Gardening** ............... landscaping, planting, pruning, decorating

**Metal and glass** .......... jewelry, beading, stained glass, mosaics

**Sculpting** ................ play-doh, clay, aluminum foil, Legos or other building pieces, models

**Woodworking** ............ carved or etched smaller items, furniture or larger items
process called entrainment) or support the way we feel (i.e., iso principle). So as you do your art activities, assess if you have the feelings you want to bring about or maintain, such as feelings of peace, pleasure, pride, and satisfaction.

**Physical responses** – Many people are not aware what is happening to their body as they participate in an art activity, yet related physical responses are often happening throughout the experience. (This is where being healthcare providers can come in handy, as we may already be sensitive to our body responses.) How does the body feel during the bulk of the art-making experience? Stressed? More relaxed? Sometimes it might be a combination of both. The key to physical responses, as for all of the different responses, is whether they feel acceptable to you, the artist, at any given time.

**Social responses** – Some art activities by nature are very social activities, while others are less so or not at all. For example, when we take photographs we often immediately send them to our friends and family. When I make a quilt, I usually have in mind whom it is for. On the other hand, journal writing is often private. James W. Pennebaker and associates have identified the numerous benefits of writing about the stressors in one's life without sharing these with anyone else (Sexton et al., 2009). So in doing your social response assessment, ask yourself whether or not you want to share the activity with someone else. Either way, are you satisfied with your social response?

**Spiritual responses** – Art experiences can sometimes have a very profound effect on us that goes beyond the above responses. This was true for Pat, who experienced the death of a patient on her night shift and made the sketch of the experience. Spiritual responses can vary in intensity, or may not occur at all. As you engage in an art activity, notice if it is giving you restorative and creative energy, and/or if there is the presence of another or of a higher power with you during the activity.

**Art-Sensing Activities**

Sometimes our energy levels are so low because of long shifts and family obligations that the thought of another activity such as art-making becomes one more “have-to” on our list. This is where art-looking/art-sensing might be just what we need.

One of the most popular contemporary art-sensing activities is listening to music, whether in our cars, our homes, or at work. The effects of music on our health have also been one of the more empirically studied areas of the arts (Pauwels et al., 2014), although full benefits are still hard to identify until research methods gain rigor.

Other ideas for art-sensing activities include purposefully opening up those art and travel books on our coffee tables, or going to the library and checking some out. Occasionally nursing organizations publish stories and artworks by nurses (Wendler, 2005). In European countries, “slow” television has become very popular – videos and sounds of fireplaces, aquariums, snow-covered mountains or waves on the beach. Go outside and “smell the roses,” or sit in an uncluttered area at home surrounded by aesthetic pieces that are important to you. Light an aromatic candle. Look at old photographs. Read a poem or short story. Go to a concert or ballet or visit a sculpture park. The ideas are endless and most cost nothing!

**A 4-Week Art Challenge**

Have you adequately explored the value of the arts in your life? Are there some external or internal barriers preventing you from being more fully engaged with them? The best way to begin is simply to start. Consider a 4-week plan with one activity and see if making or sensing art for focused times has a place of providing positive responses which could result in health and healing in your life.

**REFERENCES**


**Andrea Kovalesky, PhD, RN** teaches at the University of Washington Bothell in the School of Nursing and Health Studies. She is an avid fiber artist (knitting and quilting) but enjoys many of the arts. She teaches courses on the use of the arts in healthcare, among others, to pre-major, nursing and graduate students.