For the first time in my 40-year nursing career, the demand for advanced practice nurses who specialize in holistic and integrative care exceeds the supply. In particular, in my position as Associate Faculty for the International Nurse Coach Association, I have received a number of inquiries searching for nurse practitioners (NPs) certified in Nurse Coaching. The demand is coming from cardiologists, functional medicine physicians, integrative practices, acute care institutions, and home care agencies. Anticipating the need for board certified nurse coaches, holistic nurse leaders developed a scope and competencies for Nurse Coaching (Hess, et al., 2013), the Theory of Integrative Nurse Coaching (Dossey, 2015), and a national certification exam (AHNCC, 2013).

In the past, clinical positions for advanced practice holistic nurses were, in my experience, difficult to attain. When the New York State Education Department developed a registration for NPs in the specialty area of “holistic care,” I became registered as both an Adult NP (ANP) and Holistic NP (HNP). With these credentials, I then obtained a formal position as a Holistic NP in acute care. This role allowed me to provide inpatient consults for pain, anxiety, and end of life, as well as recommend and provide various integrative therapies, and collaborate with an interdisciplinary team. The position was ideal because it enabled me to practice to the fullest extent of my ability as a Holistic NP. However when institutional finances were strained, I was moved to administration and the traditional NP role.

In the traditional NP role, whether acute care, ambulatory, chronic care, or academia, it seems the demands for “managing patients” and the “disease process” often take priority over the focus on whole-person healing and the self-care of the patient and NP. I began searching for a role that would allow me to apply the principles and values of holistic nursing, while practicing to the full extent of my ability. This is when I discovered nurse coaching.

The NP as a Health & Wellness Nurse Coach (HWNC)
Certified in 2013 as a Health and Wellness Nurse Coach (HWNC), I have found a new NP focus and an expanded role definition. Nurse coaching necessitates the formation of a client-coach relationship, development of client goals, and support from the coach throughout the action phase. It aligns with health promotion, healing, and prevention strategies for a wide variety of patient populations, including ambulatory and acute care, chronic care divisions, and palliative care. Nurse coaching supports patient-centered care and the interdisciplinary team approach. It also aligns with the Quadruple Aim model of care described as: improved patient experience, improved outcomes, lower costs, and improved clinician experience (Bodenheimer & Sinsky, 2014).

My expanded role as both NP and HWNC is grounded in holism and nursing theory. I am guided by the five components of the Theory of Integrative Nurse Coaching:
1. Nurse Coach Self-Development
2. Integral Perspectives and Change
3. Integrative Lifestyle Health and Wellbeing
4. Awareness and Choice
5. Listening with HEART® (Dossey, 2015).

This mid-range theory also includes the use of social science theories to assist in the patient partnership and the development of goals, as well as an integrative assessment tool for both reflection and research. The first component, self-development, sets the essential tasks of self-reflection, self-assessment, self-evaluation, and self-care (Dossey, 2015), which are concepts frequently overlooked in the traditional NP role. For example, I was the speaker at a recent NP association dinner meeting, presenting the topic of Integrative Nurse Coaching, and was amazed to learn that the majority of NPs in the room were not sleeping 6-8 hours at night – a basic need we emphasize for our patients.

Role Implementation
I decided to narrow my focus from healing the “world” to a manageable caseload, concentrating on prevention and/or progression of cardiac disease and diabetes. Aligning with local...
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Cardiologists gave me the opportunity to create a NP HWNC role focused on whole-person healing in this population. At present, I practice in two different settings – one grant funded where the coaching is free for patients, and one that is fee for service. Moving from acute care to ambulatory care and focusing on cardiology allowed me to identify patients at risk, provide both primary and secondary prevention, develop coaching programs, and partner with patients and an interdisciplinary healthcare team – all focusing on lifestyle changes.

Likewise, my alliance with a physician trained in Functional Medicine opened up a new avenue for assessment, treatment, and coaching. When the focus of a client shifts from symptom management to the root cause (often connected to lifestyle), the NP focus also changes. As a NP HWNC, I incorporate both an integrative nursing and functional medicine approach to health and healing with standard food plans, integrative assessment, meditation, imagery, reflexology, essential oils, and supplements and medical foods, depending on the practice location and developed protocols. The International Nurse Coach Association, in a collaborative partnership with the Institute of Functional Medicine (IFM), provides the opportunity for continuing nurse coach education, guidelines for a functional nutrition approach to health and wellness, and updates on the latest research in health and wellness and prevention (IFM, 2016).

I also continue to incorporate guidelines from the American Heart Association and the American Diabetes Association based on individual patient assessment and goals. Assessment, including noninvasive techniques (e.g., body composition and endothelial assessment) along with nontraditional blood work (e.g., genetic testing), provides additional discussion points for client interactions. In this role, I present the information to clients, help them make sense of it, and then support them in designing realistic approaches to healing. This is different from my mandated core measure practices when I worked as an Adult NP in acute care.

Finally, the NP HWNC role provides a perfect opportunity to incorporate my NP skills and my holistic nursing skills into one position. Collaboration with like-minded professionals (other NPs, PAs, physicians, and interdisciplinary teams) ensures complete patient-centered care with delegated time to use my coaching skills. While I have focused on a small niche of the population, this role can be implemented across the spectrum of nursing care in the individual or group format, depending on learning styles and goals. Thus, the future of nurse coaches in advanced practice is tremendous – only limited by our skill, credentials, and imagination.

REFERENCES

About Nurse Coach Certification
The American Holistic Nurses Credentialing Corporation (AHNCC) offers the following national certification credentials for Nurse Coaching:

✔ Nurse Coach (NC-BC), attained after completion of 2 years or more of RN practice, 60 CNEs from an approved Coaching program, 60 hours of supervised/mentored practice, and passing the national certification exam
✔ Health and Wellness Nurse Coach (HWNC-BC), attained by candidates who meet the above criteria and are certified as holistic nurses

More information about certification in Nurse Coaching can be found at: www.ahncc.org/certification/nursecoachnchwnc.html

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