My yoga teacher often says to our class: “Flexibility in your spine gives you flexibility in your life.” This principle influences many aspects of my nursing practice and my life, and seems especially applicable when it comes to determining a good working nursing diagnosis with my clients.

As holistic nurses and nurse coaches, it is essential that we are open to multiple ways of knowing. We must allow our clients to direct and shape the nurse-client relationship. Standard 2: Diagnosis of the Holistic Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice states that “The holistic registered nurse analyzes assessment data to determine the actual or potential diagnosis,” and at the graduate-prepared level, [the nurse] “utilizes complex data and information” (ANA & AHNA, 2019, p. 70). Additionally, as nurse coaches, it is essential that we clarify “the client’s issues and concerns and/or opportunities for change based on the whole-person assessment data” (Hess et al., 2013, p. 29).

After 18 years of working as a holistic nurse practitioner in traditional settings, in 2017, I founded my holistic nurse coaching business. As I contemplate how Standard 2 continually informs and influences my practice, I’m acutely aware of the importance of being flexible in determining the nursing diagnosis. Two examples stand out in my mind:

The first is a 38-year-old female who came into the office five years ago while I was working at a local medical center. Her primary complaint was “low back pain.” This was especially upsetting to her because she was a massage therapist and had been unable to work. After completing the physical assessment, which was unremarkable, my initial nursing diagnosis was “acute pain.” However, I sensed there was more to her story, and I sat back down at my desk to listen (fortunately she was my last patient before lunch). She shared that her chronic, intermittent pain was extremely frustrating, due to her job and home life. Tuning in consciously and intuitively to the subtle whole-person aspects, such as her tone of voice and word choice, I sensed anguish in her story. She asked, “How do I know if this is the right job for me?” This led to, “Is it what I’m supposed to be doing with my life?” Within a short time, I realized that a more accurate nursing diagnosis was “spiritual distress.” Our appointment lasted well into the lunch hour. She needed to voice her deep-seated heartache and spiritual unrest.

The second example happened recently. My client was a 44-year-old female with medical diagnoses of Type 2 Diabetes, high BMI, and depression. Over the course of several coaching sessions, I learned that in high school and college, she had a promising musical career, but experienced a trauma which brought those aspirations to an abrupt halt. This impacted several decades of her life. My initial working diagnosis was “complicated grieving (due to the loss of her musical career),” and my intent was to find ways to bring music back into her life. However, during one of our sessions, as I listened more deeply and consciously tuned in to her posture and nonverbal cues, I recognized more of the complexity of her situation, and my nursing diagnosis shifted to “situational low self-esteem.” At the end of our highly meaningful session, when I asked her to determine a goal for the upcoming two weeks, it had nothing to do with music!

A nursing diagnosis is a descriptive tool which helps provide the framework for the holistic nursing care that we provide. By maintaining a continual and ever-changing awareness of the complexity and wholeness of our clients, we provide them with our highest possible level of nursing care.

REFERENCES

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