Holistic Nursing Plans of Care: Using the Power of Hope

by BONNEY GULINO SCHAU, RN, MS, PMHCNS, NC-BC

I am a Psychiatric/Mental Health Clinical Specialist and a Board Certified Nurse Coach and have been a holistic nurse for decades. In my clinical practice, I plan my work on finding out what my patient is hoping for. I was introduced to this perspective in my first nursing job when I was working nights in a head and neck surgical unit. I cared for many critically ill patients and was fortunate to have a wonderful nurse supervisor, Cathy Fanslow. One night I was caring for a young woman who was dying and expressing great despair. I provided physical care and pain management, but felt overwhelmed by her deep emotional fear and pain. I consulted Cathy who came to my unit to offer guidance. She suggested that I ask my patient what she was hoping for (Fanslow-Brunjes, 2008). I said, “I can’t ask that. She doesn’t want to die.” She gently reassured me that people always have something they are hoping for, even in these dire situations. I accepted Cathy’s guidance and spent time with my patient, who appreciated the question, reflecting on it until she found an answer. This was a profound lesson for me. It taught me that there is always hope.

Over my years of professional practice, it has been clear that meaning and connecting with higher purpose is an essential part of my holistic care plan. The following case (see box below) is an example of how I “develop a plan outlining primary strategies and suggested alternatives to attain expected outcomes” (ANA & AHNA, 2019, p. 74, Standard 4) in my holistic nurse coaching practice. Working within a Transpersonal Nurse Coaching framework (Schaub, 2016), my patients experience self-compassion, awareness, and inner wisdom, all things which allow them to make choices and take actions that deepen recovery.

REFERENCES

Bonney Gulino Schaub, RN, MS, PMHCNS, NC-BC is co-director of Huntington Meditation and Imagery Center, which offers a Clinical Meditation and Imagery certificate program and Transpersonal Nurse Coaching, an AHNA-endorsed program. She has been in private practice as a holistic psychotherapist and nurse coach for more than 30 years.

Melissa, a 31-year-old woman, experienced significant pain from trauma resulting from a car accident. She’d been repeatedly hospitalized over the previous six months because of many fractures requiring corrective surgeries. Melissa didn’t want to be dependent on medications for pain relief. A nurse friend suggested she try meditation and imagery. In our first session, Melissa told me of the dramatic losses she had experienced because of her injuries. She was unable to return to her job teaching kindergarten or her position as a pitcher in a semi-professional softball team. This was devastating because her teammates were her main social network and source of self-esteem. Melissa never felt confident as a child until she found softball. Her parents weren’t supportive of her athleticism and wanted her to be more feminine.

My plan for our first session was to guide Melissa through a body awareness meditation exploring the nature of how her body was feeling. She noticed that her discomfort wasn’t just one sensation. It manifested in various ways in different places. Helping Melissa become aware of this allowed her to separate from her pain and not experience it as one monolithic thing. After working together with the body awareness practice and guiding Melissa to use the phrase “let go,” her relationship to pain changed. She could notice distress and “let go.” As next step in my treatment plan, I referred her to an aquatic rehabilitation class at the YMCA. The ability to move freely and stretch in the water was physically pleasing and it helped her increase flexibility after classes. This was a convenient and very inexpensive practice.

As we continued to work together, I introduced the “what are you hoping for?” meditation into our sessions. At first her focus was on feeling freer and in less pain. Over several sessions, Melissa identified that she needed to find new meaning and purpose in her life at an even deeper level. She realized that she loved teaching kindergarten because she had struggled to feel accepted. Playing softball provided a level of recognition and acceptance that hadn’t been part of her school or home experience. When Melissa asked “what am I hoping for?” she experienced a very clear response, “become a mental health counselor and work with college students to find their own path towards confidence and self-care.” She was enthusiastic about this plan and explored local graduate programs in school counseling and took steps to find financial aid. Our work ended at this point with intent to re-connect as needed in the future.