Transpersonal Coaching

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Transpersonal Coaching is a new specialty in health care and nurse coaching. It is an expanded outlook about the potentials in human nature and offers a new set of skills.

“Transpersonal” means beyond the personality. It refers to the deeper, dormant resources in each person: inner peace, guiding inner wisdom, life purpose, and oneness. These transpersonal resources objectively exist and can be verified by direct experience. They yield many physical, psychological, and spiritual benefits for patients — and for the self-care and self-development of the holistic nurse as well.

The essentials of nurse coaching include presence, deep listening, spiritual intelligence, and active imagination (Hess et al., 2013, pp. 51-53). Transpersonal coaching includes these as well as a deep clinical understanding of how to apply meditation, awareness practices, imagery, and the power of the imagination in coaching practice. It speaks to the ethics of nurse coaching, stemming from a framework that recognizes the value of all life experiences as opportunities to discover personal meaning and to cultivate self-awareness that leads to positive growth (Hess et al., 2013, p. 38).

The goal of transpersonal coaching is to help patients experience the benefits of their transpersonal resources (inner peace, guiding inner wisdom, life purpose, and oneness). This
goal is ideally suited for holistically trained nurses because they are already oriented around finding new modalities for healing. The beauty of transpersonal coaching is that it is nurtured through direct practice and first-hand experience. Nurses can only become better at it by directly experiencing their own transpersonal resources more often, opening them to the same benefits as the people they help (Sahebalzamani et al., 2013). It is also an approach that can be creatively adapted and integrated into all areas of nursing practice.

**The Three Stages of Transpersonal Coaching**

There are three primary stages of transpersonal coaching that patients move through as their awareness increases and they discover meaning in these direct experiences. The different stages help patients to realize that the transpersonal part of their nature is real – it is available and capable of helping them to reduce their suffering and increase their courage:

1. Moving from fear to choice
2. The opening of the personality
3. Moving from separateness to oneness

**Moving From Fear to Choice**

Neuroscience studies indicate that the brain has a region near the amygdalae – a fear center – which scans the environment for signs of danger (Shin & Liberzon, 2010). This constant scanning puts the brain into a vigilant state, and even the normal brain is biased in favor of paying close attention to anything negative in order to survive (Hanson, 2009). The following clinical example demonstrates how a patient learned to use transpersonal skills to move from a state of fear to a state of calmness.

*Franklin, a 34-year-old veteran who served multiple tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan as a medic, is frequently in a state of vigilance. Now he is home, and studying to become a registered nurse. His vigilance particularly reveals itself when he is driving and experiences states of road rage.*

*He shared his disturbing feelings with a nurse who was a fellow veteran. This nurse had trained in Transpersonal Coaching and coached Franklin to manage the road rage.*

*With awareness practices, Franklin learned to identify the trigger for these reactions as moments of panic and fear. With guidance and practice, he learned to notice the first sign of his rage: gripping tightly on the steering-wheel. He learned to notice the behavior, name it as fear, and then take a breath. He also determined that, if possible, he would pull off the road, stop the car, let go of the steering wheel, shake his hands, place his hands on his belly, connect with his breath, and link the words “Let go” with his breathing pattern (Schaub & Schaub, 2014, p. 184).*

*He would practice this until he felt he could safely return to driving.*

**The Opening of the Personality**

When someone is faced with the crisis of a serious diagnosis or other trauma, there is a resulting loss of confidence in their sense of self. Bruce, Schreiber, Petrovskaia, and Boston (2011) referred to this degree of vulnerability as “groundlessness,” a condition that they had seen in many of their oncology patients. The following example shows how a holistic nurse used transpersonal coaching skills to support a highly vulnerable patient.

*Maria was resuming chemotherapy after a year of remission from cancer. She had begun an aggressive series of treatments. She told her nurse at the infusion center about this struggle: “Sometimes I don’t know who this is happening to. Then I’m feeling so sorry for myself. My hair is coming out again.”*

*The nurse asked Maria if she would be interested in learning an inner skill that could be helpful. Maria agreed, and she was guided into the practice of “Awareness Itself” (Schaub & Schaub, 2013, p. 118). Afterwards, Maria sat very still despite the nearby activities and discussions of all the people at the infusion center. A minute later, Maria exclaimed, “Wow!” and said:*

*“I felt the awareness like an energy between my eyebrows. Then it became visual – a yellow light with a gold rim around it. The light was alive and got so bright I could...* continued on page 16

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**Basic Principles of Transpersonal Coaching**

- Transpersonal coaching is not focused on pathology and diagnosis. It is pro-active, skill-based, and health-promoting. It is also educational – guiding patients to understand that they can learn how to awaken their deeper resources in difficult times.
- The holistic nurse is not suggesting or creating experiences but rather is awakening what already objectively exists in each patient.
- The awareness techniques that awaken the patient’s resources are safe, effective, time-tested, and easy to learn. They require no predetermined belief or mindset and are appropriate for a multi-cultural patient population.
- When patients have an experience of their inner peace, guiding inner wisdom, life purpose or oneness, their mind will naturally want to give the experience a meaning. In transpersonal coaching, patients are guided toward making their own meaning out of their experiences.
hardly see. I became immersed in it. I was in the light. Then I realized I was standing on the edge of an abyss of light. I thought, ‘What the hell,’ and I dove in. I dove in! It was fabulous. I feel completely different.”

She paused a moment and then added, “This is what I need.”

What had she experienced? Maria went beyond the part of her that was terrified, and she awakened the transpersonal aspect of her nature. It is important to note that the “Awareness Itself” practice does not suggest images, and that the patient’s imagery was spontaneously generated.

Moving from Separation to Oneness
A medical crisis can also generate a sense of isolation and separateness. It is hard to explain to others the inner experience of suffering and loss that can accompany a serious diagnosis or trauma. Through transpersonal coaching, a patient gained access to the transpersonal aspect of her nature and its creative healing images.

Julie, a 39-year-old acupuncturist and mother of two children, ages 4 and 9, was ecstatic when she learned she was pregnant again. Unfortunately, early into the pregnancy, she miscarried and was emotionally devastated when she arrived at the holistic nurse practitioner’s office.

The nurse guided Julie into a deeply relaxed state using a body scan technique (Schaub & Schaub, 2013, p. 55). Next, she was asked to imagine a very safe place where she would meet a Wise Being (Baer, Hoffmann, & Sheikh, 2003). After several quite minutes of reflection, this is what Julie reported:

“I experienced a jaguar approaching me. It didn’t frighten me – it gave me a sense of strength and calm. The large cat began to claw and claw into my lower abdomen, and I began to see the creation of a golden threaded orb. The brilliant orb detached from my physical self, and then, the jaguar’s paws began digging into the earth. Together, we buried the orb. I watched amazed as the orb became intricately part of an energetic netting beneath the soil surface.”

When she emerged from this imagery experience, Julie described overwhelming feelings of completion and release.

Summary
These are just a few of many stories shared by patients who have benefited from transpersonal coaching. This practice blends well with holistic nursing and can be easily applied to a variety of situations and healthcare settings. When a holistic nurse works from the assumption that the transpersonal aspect of human nature is an objective fact, it is possible to help patients gain access to their transpersonal nature and thereby experience new feelings and insights. The insights usually come in the form of images and energies and provide the personality with a greater sense of wholeness and courage.

References


Bonney Gulino Schaub, RN, MS, PMHCNS-BC, NC-BC developed Transpersonal Coaching from 40 years of work in nursing as a clinical practitioner, educator, and author. She is co-founder of the Huntington Meditation and Imagery Center and the New York Psychosynthesis Institute and has trained health professionals internationally. She is the author of five books: Healing Addictions: The Vulnerability Model of Recovery (1997); The End of Fear: A Spiritual Path for Realists (2009); Transpersonal Development: Cultivating the Human Resources of Peace, Wisdom, Purpose and Oneness (2013); Dante’s Path: Vulnerability the Spiritual Journey (2014) and numerous articles and book chapters on meditation, imagery, and nurse coaching.

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