Nurses and Complementary Healing Modalities
Contents

Holistic Health and Healing .................................................................................................................. 4
Holistic Health Principles ...................................................................................................................... 4
Origins of Holistic Health ...................................................................................................................... 5
Complementary, Alternative and Integrative Approaches ................................................................. 5
  Natural Products ................................................................................................................................ 6
  Mind and Body Practices ...................................................................................................................... 7
  Other Complementary Approaches ..................................................................................................... 8
Your Foundation for Holistic Nursing Practice ............................................................................... 9
  Overview ........................................................................................................................................... 9
  Nursing, Complementary and Integrative Health ............................................................................ 10
  AHNA Position Statement on Complementary & Integrative Health Approaches (CIHA) ......... 11
References ............................................................................................................................................. 12
"Holism" is the theory that the universe is made of interactive whole organisms that are more than the mere sum of their parts, and that what affects one part affects the others. The word "heal" comes from the Greek word "halos" and the Anglo-Saxon word "healen," which means "to be or to become whole." The word "holy" comes from the same source.

"Holistic health" is an approach to life where the whole person is valued. Rather than focusing on specific parts of a person’s body, holistic health considers the person’s body, thoughts, emotions, spirit and interaction with others and with the environment. The aim of holistic health is to support maximum well-being with the resources available.

Holistic Health Principles

Holistic health is based on the law of nature that a whole is made up of interdependent parts. For example, the earth is made up of systems such as air, land, water, plants and animals and the human being is made up of a body, mind, emotions and spirit. If life is to be sustained, these parts cannot be separated, for what is happening to one part affects all of the others. The whole person is also constantly interacting with its surrounding environment, including its relationships with other people. For example, when a person is anxious about a history exam or a job interview, his or her nervousness may result in a physical reaction, such as a headache or a stomachache. When a person suppresses anger over a long period, he or she often develops an illness, such as a migraine headache, arrhythmia, or arthritis.

The decisions people make about their life and habits are the largest factor in determining their state of wellness. The most obvious choices people make each day are what they "consume". Harmful substances or lack of required nutrients can result in unhealthy cells, unable to keep that person healthy. Similarly, on the mental, emotional and spiritual levels, people are greatly affected by what they take in.

Holistic health is more than just the absence of illness. It is a continual process beginning with a personal commitment to improving one’s well-being, regardless of one’s circumstances. It is the view that each person is capable of experiencing well-being at any time, even when death is approaching.
Origins of Holistic Health

Ancient healing traditions throughout the world have encouraged people to live in harmony with each other and with nature. Socrates (Greece, 4th century BC) warned against treating only one part of the body "for the part can never be well unless the whole is well."

Florence Nightingale led nurses to focus on supporting unity, wellness and the interrelationship of human beings, events and the environment during the Crimean War in the 1850's.

The word “holism” was introduced by Jan Christiaan Smuts in 1926 as a way of viewing living organisms as "entities greater than and different from the sum of their parts" and the words holism and holistic entered our modern vocabulary during the 1970’s. Now holistic health is gaining popularity each year because its ancient principles offer a practical and sustainable approach well-being.

Complementary, Alternative and Integrative Approaches

Worldwide, approximately 65 to 80 percent of the world’s population use healing modalities that were developed outside of the conventional allopathic medicine. In the USA, these non-conventional healing modalities are called “complementary”, “alternative” and “integrative”. Complementary, alternative and integrative approaches are holistic only to the extent that they are used to support a whole person. For example, an herb can be used holistically if it is taken to support a whole person, or it can be used allopathically if it is taken to support just the physical body.

The National Institute of Health’s National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH) in Bethesda, Maryland is the U.S. federal government’s lead agency for scientific research on complementary, alternative and integrative approaches to health and healing. According to the NCCIH, more than 30 percent of adults and about 12 percent of children in the USA use non-conventional health and healing modalities. People in the USA often use the words “alternative” and “complementary” interchangeably when describing non-conventional healing modalities, but these terms refer to two different concepts:

- If a non-conventional healing modality is used together with conventional medical modalities, that modality is considered “complementary”
- If a non-conventional healing modality is used in place of conventional medical modalities, that modality is considered “alternative”

The term “integrative” health care is used in a variety of ways that all involve bringing conventional and complementary approaches together in a coordinated way. The use of integrative approaches to health and healing is growing across the United States. Researchers are
exploring the potential benefits of integrative modalities in a wide variety of situations, including pain management for military personnel and veterans, cancer symptom relief and health promotion.

Most complementary health and healing approaches fall into one of two subgroups: Natural Products and Mind-Body Practices.

**Natural Products**

This group includes a variety of products, such as herbs (also known as botanicals) and probiotics. They are widely marketed, readily available to consumers, and often sold as dietary supplements.

According to the 2012 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS), which included a comprehensive survey on the use of complementary health approaches by Americans, 17.7 percent of American adults had used a dietary supplement other than vitamins and minerals in the past year. These products were the most popular complementary health approach in the survey. (See chart below.) The most commonly used natural product was fish oil.

While there are indications that some natural products may be helpful, more needs to be learned about the effects of these products in the human body and about their safety and potential interactions with other natural products and with medications.
Mind and Body Practices

Mind and body practices include a large and diverse group of procedures or techniques administered or taught by a trained practitioner or teacher. The 2012 NHIS showed that deep breathing, yoga, chiropractic and osteopathic manipulation, meditation, and massage therapy are among the most popular mind and body practices used by adults. The popularity of yoga has grown dramatically in recent years, with almost twice as many U.S. adults practicing yoga in 2012 as in 2002.

Other mind and body practices include acupuncture, relaxation techniques (such as guided imagery and progressive muscle relaxation), tai chi, qi gong, healing touch, hypnotherapy and movement therapies (such as Feldenkrais method, Alexander technique, Pilates, Rolfing Structural Integration and Trager psychophysical integration).

The amount of research on mind and body approaches varies widely depending on the practice. For example, researchers have done many studies on acupuncture, yoga, spinal manipulation and meditation, but there have been fewer studies on some other practices.
Other Complementary Approaches

Natural products and mind and body practices capture most complementary health approaches. However, some approaches may not neatly fit into either of these groups, for example, the practices of traditional healers, Ayurveda medicine, traditional Chinese medicine, homeopathy and naturopathy, which cross the two main categories because they are more holistic.

Below is a graph that shows the ten most common complementary health approaches among adults in the USA in 2012.

10 most common complementary health approaches among adults—2012

- Natural Products: 17.7%
- Deep Breathing: 10.9%
- Yoga, Tai Chi, or Qi Gong: 10.1%
- Chiropractic or Osteopathic Manipulation: 8.4%
- Meditation: 8.0%
- Massage: 6.9%
- Special Diets: 3.0%
- Homeopathy: 2.2%
- Progressive Relaxation: 2.1%
- Guided Imagery: 1.7%

*Dietary supplements other than vitamins and minerals.

Your Foundation for Holistic Nursing Practice

Overview

Holistic care refers to approaches and interventions that address the needs of the whole person: body, mind, emotion and spirit. Healing arts are those interventions that foster an individual’s healing process; a return of the individual toward a state of wholeness in which body, mind, emotional spirit are integrated and balanced, and the person is able to reach deeper levels of personal understanding. Healing does not equate to curing, although they can be synchronous. The nursing profession has a long history of caring for individuals in a holistic manner and integrating the healing arts with conventional treatments. Prior to the famous works of Florence Nightingale of England in the 1850s, American nurses were already renowned for holistic approaches to care in their sickroom management, which is today referred to as creating an optimal healing environment. These optimal healing environments consider touch, light, aromatics, empathetic listening, music, quiet reflection, and similar healing measures as essential ingredients to good nursing care. Today’s education of holistically trained registered nurses and advanced practice nurses is built upon these same principles.

The American Holistic Nurses’ Association (AHNA) is a professional specialty nursing association dedicated to the promotion of holism and healing. The AHNA believes that nurses enter therapeutic partnerships with clients, their families, and their communities to serve as facilitators in the healing process. This partnership begins with being mindfully aware and present in all interactions at work and in life. The holistic nursing care process supported by AHNA is one in which nurses abide by the following commitments:

- Acquire and maintain current knowledge and competency in holistic nursing practice. This may include integrating complementary and integrative therapies into that nursing practice.
- Provide care and guidance to persons through nursing interventions and therapies consistent with evidence-based research findings and other sound evidence.
- Embrace a professional code of ethics and healing that seeks to preserve wholeness and dignity of self and others. Engage in self-care.
- Develop continual growth and personal awareness of his or her own unique capacity to serve as an instrument of healing.
- Practice mindful presence in all interactions.
- Assess clients holistically, using traditional nursing concepts and incorporating therapeutic communication to identify a broader scope of factors that are potential contributors to increased stress.
- Create a plan of care in collaboration with clients and their significant others that is consistent with cultural background, health beliefs, sexual orientation, values, and
preferences focusing on health promotion, recovery, restoration, or peaceful dying while maintaining an optimal level of personal independence for as long as possible.

Realizing the recent change in name of the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) to the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH), nurses as patient advocates need to be familiar with the terminology to support health literate decisions by patients. NCCIH defines “complementary” as a practice used together with conventional medicine; “alternative” refers to a non-mainstream practice used in place of conventional medicine. “Integrative” health care, involves the coordination of conventional and complementary approaches. (https://nccih.nih.gov/health/integrative-health). The change from a focus on Alternative Medicine to Integrative Health further supports the role of holistic nurses, who have long been champions of Integrative Health.

**Nursing, Complementary and Integrative Health**

The AHNA believes that inherent in the nursing role is the ability to assess, plan, intervene, evaluate, and perform preventive, supportive, and restorative functions of the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual domains. Therefore, it is expected that the nurse integrate principles and techniques of conventional, complementary and alternative practices, that these are within the scope of nursing practice and that this is holistic nursing care.

AHNA supports the integration of complementary and alternative therapies into conventional health care to enable the client to benefit from the best of all treatments available. In their provision of holistic care, nurses employ practices and therapies from complementary, alternative and conventional medicine, thus creating integrative health care.

Consistent with conventional nursing practice, nurses must be competent in the integrative therapies and practices they employ. The AHNA believes nurses integrate these practices into conventional care as part of their holistic practice. In addition, nurses support and assist clients with their use of integrative health interventions provided by other practitioners by:

- Identifying the need for complementary and alternative interventions
- Assisting clients in locating providers of those
- Facilitating the use of integrative health care through education, counseling, coaching and other forms of assistance
- Coordinating the use of integrative health care in collaboration with various health care providers
- Evaluating the effectiveness of clients’ integrative health care
AHNA Position Statement on Complementary & Integrative Health Approaches (CIHA)

The AHNA believes that although selected Complementary and Integrative Health Approaches (CIHA) are appropriate interventions for use by nurses, the use of these interventions must be integrated into a comprehensive holistic nursing practice. However, practicing within a holistic nursing framework does not imply competency in effective and safe use of CIHA. Nurses are responsible for gaining additional education and experience and demonstrating clinical competency in all interventions they use in their nursing practice.

A nurse practicing as a therapist of a specific conventional therapy or CIHA must have the education, skills and credentials ascribed for that therapy. The nurse also must operate within the legal scope of practice of the nurse’s licensure and jurisdiction.

AHNA views nurses as being in a unique position to implement CIHA throughout the health care system in that registered nurses:

- Represent the greatest number of health care professionals, representing more than 3.2 million health care professionals, and are employed in more diverse clinical settings than any other health care professional
- Are uniquely prepared to differentiate normality from illness, provide interventions for health promotion and illness-related care, and use a wide range of medical technology and healing arts
- Are advocates for clients rather than specific products or practices, therefore are in an excellent position to assure appropriate and adequate use of all types of services
- Are trusted and held in high esteem by consumers

These factors support nurses holding a leadership role in the implementation of CIHA in various service settings and the coordination of CIHA used by clients as part of an integrated approach to health.

Approved by AHNA Board of Directors June 2016
Developed by AHNA Practice Committee

AHNA Practice Committee: Rebecca Cohen, EdD, RN, HNB-BC, MS, MPA; Bonnie Denholm, DNP, RN, CNOR; Padma Dyvine, RN, MA, CHPN, AHN-BC; Saloni Malhotra, RN, BSN, HNB-BC, CHPN, CCAP; Debbie McElligott, DNP, AHN-BC, HWNC-BC; Betsy Murphy, RN, BSN, HNB-BC, ERYT; Marci Resnicoff, RN, BSN, BA, HNB-BC; Susan Rose, RN, BSN, MSN; Sara Scheller, RN, BSN, CPN, CCRN; Rita Shertick, RN, BSN; James Welch, RN, HNB-BC
References


