



Transcending Differences

By Lucia Thornton

A Holistic Approach

Caring for patients from different cultures, social backgrounds, and ideologies offers a wonderful opportunity for nurses to expand their world view and appreciate life's diversity.

Sometimes, however, the differences that exist become barriers to effective communication and the delivery of compassionate nursing care. Using tools and practices of holistic communication can help you navigate through these difficult times.

Engage Your Observer

Engaging your observer is a helpful process used when confronting a situation or communication that is particularly difficult and emotionally charged. It also helps the nurse be *present* to a person and/or situation with clarity and without bias. This is very useful when the nurse's personal, social and cultural

beliefs are in conflict with those of the person he or she is caring for. Using a practice that can allow the nurse to suspend judgment and set aside interfering beliefs is crucial in creating a caring and healing interaction.

The observer, or witness, is a non-judgmental aspect. Some perceive this aspect as a *Higher Self*, which can be likened to a wise grandparent that looks sensibly upon the thoughts and reactions of our childlike minds. It gives us the ability to observe life without engaging our past patterns of reacting emotionally.

The observer acts as a third party that allows us to separate from personal feelings in situations so that communication can occur from a space of clarity and wisdom. Using this technique enhances self-knowledge and self-awareness as it provides constant feedback related to our responses and reactions to situations.

The observer, while embracing the whole of the moment, is able to transcend the ego so that we respond with wisdom rather than reacting from conditioned response.

Engaging the observer involves *centering* (or grounding) oneself, being aware of internal reactions, acknowledging these reactions, and responding from the Higher Self. This is a technique that allows us to access our Higher Self and move from that place of higher consciousness in our interactions with another person. This is central to the transpersonal caring process and communicating from a holistic perspective (Thornton, in press). See “Engaging Your Observer in a Difficult Situation” above.

CLEAR Communication

Sometimes an acronym is useful when trying to acquire new skills. The *CLEAR* acronym has been used by nurses to help them remember some of the processes involved in holistic communication. See “Holistic Communication: Be CLEAR” on page 48.

Engaging Your Observer in a Difficult Situation

SITUATION: A patient’s family member approaches you angrily, accusing you in a very loud voice of neglecting to administer a medication on time.

- *Center yourself and create an intention.* Take a breath, bring your attention to the area around your heart, and connect with a feeling of love and compassion. Think to yourself, “I am here for the greater good of all.”
- *Observer relates your internal reactions—emotionally, mentally and physically.* “This person really scares you. You want to run away from this person. Your chest is starting to feel constricted and your heart is starting to race.”
- *Acknowledge these reactions, set them aside and engage your Higher Self.* “Yes, anger makes me uncomfortable.” Take another deep breath and silently repeat, “I release these thoughts and feelings, I am here for the greater good of all.”
- *Focus on the Person/Situation.* Be fully present to the person/situation from a place of wisdom and compassion.

This entire process takes about five seconds and allows the nurse to set aside thoughts and feelings that interfere with a healing-caring interaction (Thornton, 2000, 2006).

CENTER LISTEN EMPATHY ATTENTION RESPECT

Connecting with Yourself: Connecting with Others

Holistic communication is distinguished by the depth and profound quality of *presence*. Jean Watson speaks of the “full use of self” in the transpersonal caring process (Watson, 1999). A nurse that becomes heart-

centered has the capacity to connect with another person at a deep psychosocial, heartfelt and spiritual level. This is a difficult concept to describe and remains more of a felt experience. As nurses, we must be able to access and rest in the depth of our own life before bringing this transcendent, caring, and healing presence into a relationship.

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Being able to communicate from more profound levels of presence is the result of experience and engaging in processes of deep reflection and inquiry. Cultivating this type of presence, however, is something that can be learned through direct experience and role modeling (Rankin, 2006).

Including various self-reflective practices such as journaling, meditation, relaxation, contemplation, dream analysis, narrative and storytelling in our personal daily practice can help cultivate a deeper relationship with the essence of our existence that can then be brought into a relationship with another. We must be able to connect with our own transcendent nature before we can establish that connection with others. ☺

Holistic Communication: Be CLEAR

CENTER YOURSELF

- Pause for a moment.
- Breathe deeply.
- Connect with a feeling of love and compassion.
- Create a silent intention that thoughts, words, and actions will be for the greater good.

LISTEN WHOLEHEARTEDLY

- Set aside your own thoughts, emotions, and feelings.
- Focus on the person's agenda.
- Don't judge or analyze.
- Open your heart to what is being communicated.

EMPATHIZE

- Come from a place of genuine concern.
- Have the ability to feel with a person, not sorry for.
- Empathy involves an understanding that comes from sensing into the being of another.

ATTENTION: BEING FULLY PRESENT.

- Be aware of what you are feeling and sensing. Stay present to yourself.
- Bring the fullness of yourself to every moment—emotionally, mentally, physically, and spiritually.

RESPECT

- Respect all that is.
- Respect yourself—set boundaries if needed.
- Respect person—honor cultural, social, ontological, and ideological differences.
- Welcome diversity.

references

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