

Fostering Resilience in the Face of Adversity: A Holistic Approach to Nursing Care

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Abstract:

Research has identified a link between chronic physical diseases and mental illness, underscoring a nurse's responsibility to care for more than just the physical body in order to promote total wellness. By providing *holistic care* nurses can help patients achieve higher levels of *resilience*, thereby improving total wellness; Swanson's Theory of Caring can effectively guide nurses in this effort.

Research Concern:

By providing *holistic care* – caring for the mental, emotional, social, and spiritual needs of a client rather than only the physical – the nurse fosters *resilience*, empowering the patient to better cope with the difficulties of life. This research depicts holistic care in practice and provides practical suggestions to nurses seeking to care for each patient as a whole person rather than simply as a disease process.

Research Method:

Three case studies involving interactions of the researcher with a patient are reviewed by qualitative analysis. Verbal and nonverbal aspects of the interactions are documented in tables (process recordings), and the researcher evaluates the interactions to provide practical suggestions for applying concepts of holistic care to nursing practice.

Research Questions:

- 1) How can a nurse provide holistic care to meet the needs and promote the resilience of a terminally ill cancer patient and her spouse?
- 2) How can a nurse provide holistic care to meet the needs and promote the resilience of a post-operative thoracotomy client facing intense pain, procedural anxiety, and a new diagnosis?
- 3) How can a nurse provide holistic care to meet the needs and promote the resilience of a mentally ill client recovering from a suicide attempt and an eating disorder?



Swanson's Theory of Caring

Caring is a nurturing way of relating to a valued other toward whom one feels a personal sense of commitment & responsibility

Knowing	Being With	Doing For	Enabling	Maintaining Belief
Striving to understand an event as it has meaning in the life of the other.	Being emotionally present to the other.	Doing for the other as he/she would do for the self if it were at all possible.	Facilitating the other's passage through life transitions & unfamiliar events.	Sustaining faith in the other's capacity to get through an event or transition & face a future with meaning.



Case #1: Terminal Cancer

Effective holistic strategies to promote resilience include...

- Prioritizing the client's goals (including comfort) first
- Remaining optimistic that progress towards those goals is possible, despite the fact that recovery is not expected
- Using active listening & nonverbal communication techniques (especially silence & therapeutic touch) to convey empathy
- Avoiding judgment of the client's expressions of emotion

Case #2: Procedural Pain & Anxiety

Effective holistic strategies to promote resilience include...

- Recognizing that spiritual care can involve a wide variety of interventions
- Recognizing that not all clients will prefer the same level of spiritual intervention
- Recognizing the client's unique perspective on his/her care
- Using nonverbal communication techniques (especially therapeutic touch) to convey empathy

Case #3: Suicide Attempt Recovery

Effective holistic strategies to promote resilience include...

- Asking open-ended questions to explore emotions without probing
- Paraphrasing the client's statements to convey active listening & interest
- Avoiding judgment of the client's expressions of emotion
- Using nonverbal communication techniques (especially intermittent eye contact & facing the client at eye level) to convey empathy & equality

Conclusions:

All identified holistic interventions fall into one of Swanson's five caring processes; these case studies do effectively depict holistic nursing theory in practice. The strategies listed can be performed even during short interactions with the client to convey genuine interest in the client's wellbeing and build rapport. In this context the nurse is able to individualize the provision of holistic care to foster a greater level of resilience.