



Holistic Nursing *in the* SCHOOL HEALTH ROOM

By Arleen Barlow, BSN, MA



"I know that everything my whole life has been about, what every turn in the road of my nursing career has prepared me for and has led me to, is founding an organization for holistic nurses. I will devote the rest of my life to healing and nurturing nurses, myself, the nursing profession and the planet" (McGuire, C. 1980). Charlotte, also known by her colleagues as Charlie McGuire, was a highly successful healthcare administrator first in charge of certifying hospitals and nursing homes for Medicare and then as a corporate director of nurses for a huge and powerful healthcare company that managed hospitals all over the world. This is how her friend Margaret Hatcher describes her in the Fall 2008 issue of *Beginnings*, the official publication of the American Holistic Nurses Association. What happened to Charlie was the answer to a troubling problem...discontent with the state of health care almost 30 years ago. Today we find ourselves at a new crossroads in America. Our country' wants change. And the nurses who continue to practice with dedication to healing and wholeness want change. Some of the answers are right under our noses. It's time to start smelling them.

Arlene Barlow describes below how she opened her mind and expanded her practice in a way that embraced the already known elements of caring and optimism while working in school nursing. Holistic care is not new. It 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. The nursing profession has a long history of caring for individuals in a holistic manner and integrating the healing arts with conventional treatments. Florence Nightengale recognized this and considered healing measures as essential ingredients to good nursing care. Today's education of registered nurses is built upon these same principles (AHNA, 2009). It is in this spirit and with this recognition that we bring you stories of nurses practicing holistically. Perhaps, one day, we will be able to embrace these basic nursing principles in every place where people are nursed.

~ Deb Ilardi

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Many times I have contemplated my practice as a school nurse. I see students with a host of issues. Although students come to me regarding their physical ills, I ask a myriad of questions to get to the root of the problem, and often come to the conclusion that there is a psychological, spiritual, or social/emotional component to the presenting problem. I have practiced nursing for many years, in a variety of settings. In the past decade I became aware that I treat the whole person. Therefore, I consider myself a *holistic* school nurse. Most nurses practice a type of holistic nursing. However, I consciously utilize a variety of techniques that I have learned over several years.

According to the American Holistic Nursing Association, *holistic nursing* is “all nursing practice that has healing the whole person as its goal.” As the school nurse in a large inner-city school I experience seeing many students from many different cultures, and belief systems, some with perceptions that differ from my own. I realize that I am an instrument of healing and a facilitator in the healing process. I have the opportunity to integrate complementary/alternative modalities into my clinical practice. I stay within the limits of my scope of practice in the school setting, but I believe that I go one step further in interacting with students. I use smell, hearing, touch, sight, and occasionally taste to promote healing. I may have soft music playing on my computer, I have a vanilla-scented non-flame candle in my room and I also have some lovely photos hanging on the walls. I often use touch. I keep with the theme of healing the whole person. Yes, I use conventional therapies that are known to relieve pain such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen, but I also use various forms of meditation and talk therapy. I have become very aware of what the student is *not* saying in our brief interview and I also have learned how to interpret body language.

Students present with so many ills, the primary ones being headache and stomach ache. Yes, I have students with sore throats and the array of cuts, scrapes and bruises. Most of the stomach aches and headaches are related to stress, anxiety, or depression. I do have students who have been diagnosed with various medical conditions that also cause these symptoms; however, in most cases the root goes back to a psychological issue. I may use a form of meditation, or allow the student to recognize the problem and we try to problem-solve. I also know when to refer the student to our mental health clinician.

As nurses we are allowed to touch students. This is a gift, since other school personnel are forbidden to do so. A hand on the shoulder, some gentle pressure to a sore neck or touching the brow all say much to the student. As I touch my students, indeed I make the human connection with them but I also bring *energy healing* to them.

“Energy medicine is safe, natural, and accessible. It is both contemporary and ancient...energy medicine is the art and science of fostering the physical, psychological, and spiritual health and well-being. It combines a rational knowledge and intuitive understanding of the energies in the body and the environment.”

(Eden, 1998)

Most nurses are familiar with a number of therapeutic touch systems in use today; the most popular are Dolores Kreiger’s Therapeutic Touch, Reiki, and Pranic Healing. Some therapeutic energy healing systems use physical body touch and others do not. Some may involve client/student participation, others do not. Various texts give instructions regarding a host of energy healing systems. I use some physical touch if appropriate, and personal intention as needed. One need not be a Reiki master or certified in any of the various energy healing therapies to use energy as a healing tool. However, if you take classes and earn certification, you will find your abilities to heal enhanced.



The hands and fingers of the nurse are particularly sensitive and as you place your hand on the sore area of someone’s neck the fingers convey information regarding hot, cold, tension, knots, stiffness, and more. I have found that gentle pressure is all that is needed to improve the flow of energy to the area. Knots and stiff areas block energy flow, and the modified massage opens the energy gate and enhances the flow. It is quick and just like you feel after a back rub, the student feels so much better!

Regarding the stomach ache, either the nurse or the student himself can place one or both hands on the abdominal area and image healing light coming into the body. Encourage the student to close his eyes and concentrate on breath and breathing in healing energies of the universe and exhaling tension, fear, anxiety and all that they connote as life diminishing. I have had some success using this technique. For the headache I have used the old-fashioned hand on forehead, which works wonders for some students; they actually do not need their prescribed acetaminophen. Students who have a sprain, bruise, or even abrasion have told me that just having my hand touch them makes them feel better. Remember back when you were a child and your mother would touch you when you were hurting? Our students respond to the same



treatment. These mothers the world over were facilitating energy healing in their children.

Complementary and alternative modalities of nursing care are delivered every day in health rooms all across our country by the school nurse. I wanted to shed some light on this observation to help school nurses become more aware of complementary treatments to use with students and in turn enhancing our practice. 🐼

REFERENCES

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AHNA Mission

The American Holistic Nursing Association nurtures and inspires its members and advances the philosophy and practices of holistic nursing.

AHNA Vision

Holistic Nursing - Caring - Healing - Transforming

AHNA's Leadership Council has adopted a vision statement that communicates the great power of holistic nursing: that holistic nursing is healing and transforming to those in our care — and to each of us.

AHNA Statement of Purpose

The American Holistic Nurses Association (AHNA) is a non-profit membership association for nurses and other holistic healthcare professionals, serving more than 3,500 members and more than 140 local network chapters across the U.S. and abroad.

AHNA promotes the education of nurses, other healthcare professionals, and the public in all aspects of holistic caring and healing. The efforts of AHNA recently resulted in the recognition of holistic nursing as an "official nursing specialty" by the American Nurses Association.

AHNA advances the profession of holistic nursing by providing continuing education in holistic nursing, helping to improve the health care workplace through the incorporation of the concepts of holistic nursing, educating professionals and the public about holistic nursing and integrative health care, and promoting research and scholarship in the field of holistic nursing.

AHNA has taken positions on the practice of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM), holistic nursing ethics, and research and scholarship within the field of holistic nursing. In addition, AHNA monitors and responds to government policy initiatives around the U.S. Most recently, AHNA issued a response to the FDA on its draft document:

Guidance for Industry on Complementary and Alternative Medicine Products and Their Regulation by the Food and Drug Administration.

As a resource to its members, AHNA provides a supportive community, informative publications, continuing education, local networking opportunities, liability insurance, and a focus on self-care and wellness, among others.

AHNA is the only full-service professional organization representing the nation's holistic nurses, and is at the forefront of policy relating to holistic nursing and integrative health care. AHNA recognizes the bond linking patient satisfaction and holistic nursing, as well as the connection between holism and career fulfillment. AHNA and its networks are working to legitimize holistic health care and to help resolve the nursing shortage.

AHNA is affiliated with the American Holistic Nurses Certification Corporation (AHNCC).

In December of 2006, due to the efforts of AHNA, holistic nursing was recognized as an "official nursing specialty" by the American Nurses Association, with its own defined scope and standards of practice. Read more about our accomplishments and activities.

AHNA serves as a bridge between conventional healthcare and complementary/alternative healing practices. As health care professionals, holistic nurses may integrate complementary and alternative modalities (CAM) into clinical practice to treat the whole person and view healing as a partnership between a person seeking treatment and their practitioner.

AHNA Goals

- To provide continuing education in holistic nursing
- To help to improve the health care workplace by promoting the incorporation of the concepts of holistic nursing
- To educate professionals and the public about holistic nursing and integrative health care
- To serve as a resource to members
- To promote research and scholarship in the field of holistic nursing

“The words ‘Holistic Nursing’ mean nursing the whole person in the ways of Nightingale...fresh air, fresh food and water, spiritual sustenance, and mental and emotional support leading to clarity for the one being cared for.”

AHNA member Julie Nelson, RN, HN-BC

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Arleen Barlow, BSN, MA is a school nurse at Hartford Public High School and has worked there for 7 years. She has been a nurse since 1969.