‘Holistic nursing and hospice nursing have a lot in common,’’ says author and holistic nurse, Lucia Thornton. ‘‘As a matter of fact, if you compare the scope and standards of practice for both specialties, the vast majority of the content is the same or very similar.’’

Through a collaboration with the American Holistic Nurses Association, NewsLine is pleased to share this article by Lucia, who discusses the key principles of holistic nursing and how these principles can be used by hospice nurses as a way to care for themselves and, in so doing, improve the care provided to patients. The end of the article also includes information on holistic nursing certification, for clinicians interested in learning about dual certification.

**Caring for Ourselves:**
**A Holistic Nurse Provides Guidance**

By Lucia Thornton, RN, MSN, AHN-BC

The emotional and psychological challenges which hospice nurses face each day may, at times, feel overwhelming and may contribute to a high percentage of nurse burnout and nurse turnover. However, integrating practices and concepts of self-care and self-healing that are central to holistic nursing can help hospice nurses create healthier ways of being and decrease burnout and turnover. This article discusses these key concepts—and how to integrate them into your daily life.

**Being a Caring and Healing Presence**

A primary focus of holistic nursing is to bring caring and healing back into our healthcare system. The first step in this process is for nurses to learn to love and care for themselves. While this may seem a selfish pursuit, it is not. Learning to care deeply for yourself by taking the time to nurture yourself physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually is absolutely essential. When you do, you begin to realize your wholeness and you actually become a healing presence for your patients.

Who you are, how you feel inside, and the attitude that you convey have a profound effect on the patient. When you walk into a patient’s home feeling depleted and exhausted, you are creating an unhealthy environment by your presence. If, on the other hand, you are well rested and feel content and peaceful, you create a healthy and wholesome environment by your very presence.

Taking good care of yourself is a prerequisite to providing quality care for your hospice patients. Learning to listen deeply to your own heart and your own truth allows you to connect in a deeply caring way. As the distinguished professor of nursing, Jean Watson, says, ‘‘We must learn to treat ourselves with love and respect before we are able to treat others that way.’’ Love and caring are essential in the healing process, both for you and your patients!
Role Models for Healthy Living
Holistic nurses strive to be models of healthy behavior by creating optimal health in every aspect of their lives. Achieving optimal health is a continual and lifelong process that involves deep inner inquiry, exploration, commitment and perseverance.

Resistance to change, self-doubt, and low self-esteem can block your journey to optimal nurturance. Examining these blocks is crucial for understanding and identifying sources of resistance. Many of these attitudes and beliefs are caused by social conditioning and early life experiences that simply no longer apply to adult life. Being willing to explore what lies beneath the surface is important if we are to create healthy patterns of living.

Commitment to Self-care, Self-exploration and Awareness
Taking time to examine the various aspects of your life is crucial to living in a conscious way. The first step in this process is gaining an awareness of your patterns and habits and bringing into consciousness that which has been unconscious. Some of the practices utilized by holistic nurses for self-exploration and awareness include meditation, creating time for reflection and introspection, dream work, mindfulness practice, and journaling. (See the sidebar.)

Centering and Intention Setting
Centering and creating an intention for healing are processes the holistic nurse engages in prior to any patient interaction. Centering involves focusing your attention on your heart, setting aside concerns and thoughts, and connecting with feelings of love and compassion. A compassionate attitude is foundational in hospice care. Every decision we make, and every interaction we have with our patients and families, must be informed first and foremost by compassion.

Creating an intention is a powerful way for the nurse to create an optimal environment for a caring-healing and compassionate interaction. Examine the following intention: “I am here for the greater good of this person. I set aside my own concerns and worries and am fully present to the person here and now.” With this intention the nurse is consciously setting aside her own concerns and focusing on the patient. She has set into motion the dynamic that this interaction will be “for the greater good of this person” and she is making a conscious decision to be fully present. The nurse, through this intention, creates an environment that promotes and sustains a caring, healing and compassionate interaction. This type of interaction creates a healing environment that nurtures both the nurse and the patient. (See the sidebar.)

Integrating Holistic Nursing into Hospice Practice
Many holistic nurses utilize a variety of complementary and alternative therapies as part of providing holistic care. These include subtle energy healing (e.g. Healing Touch, Therapeutic Touch, Reiki), reflexology, guided imagery, aromatherapy, massage, music and sound therapy, and acupressure. Holistic nurses, through their knowledge and understanding of complementary and alternative practices, guide their patients in safely integrating these therapies into their lives. (See the article at the end of this document about how one holistic nurse uses restorative yoga to help meet hospice patients’ needs.)

Holistic nursing is a way of being, living and practice that can enhance your effectiveness as a hospice nurse. Holistic nursing encourages the nurse to nurture and care for her own self and adopt a healthier and more wholesome lifestyle. In so doing, the hospice nurse

About AHNA
The American Holistic Nurses Association is a non-profit membership association for nurses and other holistic healthcare professionals. Founded in 1981, AHNA is the definitive voice for holistic nursing, and promotes the education of nurses, other healthcare professionals, and the public in all aspects of holistic caring and healing, serving as a bridge between conventional medicine and complementary and alternative healing practices. To learn more, visit www.ahna.org
becomes a healing presence for patients and co-workers and helps create a healing environment and a vital and healthy workplace.

**Board Certification in Holistic Nursing**
There are currently 12 undergraduate programs in the U.S. which are endorsed by the American Holistic Nurses Certification Corporation and prepare undergraduate students in holistic nursing. For more information about holistic nursing, visit the website of the [American Holistic Nurses Association](http://www.ahnas.org).

*Lucia Thornton is the past president of the American Holistic Nurses Association. She has been involved in nursing, holistic healing, and healthcare for more than 35 years and has developed The Model of Whole-Person Caring™, a holistic interdisciplinary program with demonstrated success in improving patient satisfaction, increasing nurse retention and creating a healthy workplace. She was also instrumental in creating one of the first residential hospice homes in the country. Email Lucia at lucia@luciathornton.com or visit [www.luciathornton.com](http://www.luciathornton.com).*

**Sidebar**

**Questions for Self-exploration**
Take some time each day to reflect on an aspect of your life. Here are some questions to help you get started:

- **Physical**: Is my diet optimal? Does my intake consist mainly of whole and natural foods? Are my elimination patterns frequent and regular? Do I receive optimal sleep and rest daily? Do I engage in beneficial movement and exercise daily? Do my breathing patterns promote well being?
- **Mental**: Do I have a problem-solving orientation toward life rather than a victim mentality? Do I usually have a positive attitude and positive thoughts toward work? Do I have a sense of humor? Do I possess self-awareness—am I objective about my strengths, limitations and possibilities? Am I able to perceive reality with clarity?
- **Emotional**: Do I love and accept myself and others? Am I able to give and receive love? Am I able to express my own truth? Am I able to have deep feelings of identification, sympathy, and affection for others?
- **Social/Relational**: Do I engage in relationships that are loving? Do I engage in relationships that promote growth in myself and others? Am I able to set healthy boundaries with others? Do I engage in work that is meaningful?
- **Spiritual/Energetic**: Am I able to connect with God/higher self/universe/spirit? Do I engage in meditation/prayer/introspective practices regularly? Do I know and understand love as the essence of self? Do I have a deep respect for all?

Take your time in addressing each question. Remember this is a lifelong process of deep inner inquiry and growth. As you go through these questions, note when you respond with a powerful “no.” These are the areas that need your attention. Focus on one area at a time. Create some short and long-term goals for each of the areas that you want to improve. Remember to treat yourself with compassion, love and kindness!

**Centering and Intention-setting Technique**
- Pause for a moment before entering the patient’s room.
- Set aside any concerns regarding the past or the future. These can be picked up when leaving the room.
- Gently close your eyes.
- Breathe deeply and slowly.
- Repeat to yourself, “I am here for the greater good of this patient—I give my full attention to the here and now.”
- Direct awareness to the area around your heart, bringing to mind something or someone that evokes your love and compassion.
- When connected with that feeling, repeat again, “I am present to the moment.”
- This entire process takes between 5 to 10 seconds.

Adapting Restorative Yoga for the Hospice Patient

By Liz George, RN, BSN, PHN, HNB-BC

The inspiration to offer restorative yoga to my hospice patients came from a young hospice resident who had lived with cancer for many years, maintaining his health with a vegan diet and a regular yoga practice. When he arrived at the hospice residence, he was no longer able to practice yoga and greatly lamented the loss.

I have practiced yoga for over eight years and it occurred to me that restorative yoga might offer this young man the opportunity to enjoy yoga postures even while bedbound. I made a list of several restorative postures I thought might be appropriately done in bed and offered to assist him into those postures, with the help of two volunteers, and he was quite eager to try them.

We began with a legs up a chair pose by placing a chair on the bed and using a draw sheet to hold his feet together onto the chair. His arms and head were well supported with pillows and his eyes were covered with a small pillow filled with rice and lavender. After a cleansing breath, in through his nose and out through his mouth, he was instructed to breathe deeply in and out through his nose, consciously letting go of his stress and tension with every outgoing breath. He remained in this posture for approximately 10 minutes, after which I called the patient’s name, let him know we would be changing position, and slowly moved him out of the position.

Next, we helped the patient into a Butterfly posture. Once the chair was removed from the bed and the patient was flat on his back again, a volunteer helped me to log-roll him onto his side. I placed a small rolled blanket in the center of the bed and the patient rolled onto it so that it was along his spine from the base of his neck to his sacrum. Again his head and arms were well supported with pillows. We drew his feet together so that the soles touched, placing blankets under his knees to support them and using a draw sheet to gently hold his feet together. I repeated the instructions to take a cleansing breath and then to use each outgoing breath to let go of tension and stress.

After 10 minutes, we assisted the patient to lie on his stomach with a small rolled towel in a v shape supporting his head, his arms palms down at his sides and his feet supported by pillows. After 5 minutes, we raised his arms over his head for another 5 minutes, then gently returned him to his back.

Finally, we assisted the patient onto his back, legs and arms outstretched to the edges of the bed, head well supported with pillows, a rolled blanket under his ankles, arms supported by pillows, the rice and lavender eye pillow in place and an extra blanket covering him. He fell asleep in this position, waking after 30 minutes to express an increased sense of calm and the returning to sleep for a nap of several hours duration.

Since that initial experience, I have had the opportunity to help patients into postures several times. The legs up a chair posture is very effective for patients with lower extremity edema and relieves discomfort for patients with pressure ulcers. The postures offer patients the ability to achieve deeper relaxation when
combined with deep breathing or guided imagery. Even patients who have never practiced yoga have been open to trying these gentle supported postures. I am grateful to that young man for inspiring the addition of restorative yoga to my CAM repertoire.

For more information, read the article, Restorative Yoga, from the Yoga Journal.

Liz George is a board certified holistic nurse with the Zen Hospice Project in San Francisco, CA