



The Meaning of Caring in Nursing Practice

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Introduction

The dynamic essence of nursing is due to caring. Unfortunately, many different terms such as care, care-giving, care receiving, nursing care, etc., are used interchangeably which promotes confusion. Thus, the concept of care can be considered one of the least understood parts of nursing. It is important to note that because there are multiple ways to define caring from different paradigms, the frame of reference is imperative to understand the definition.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze three conceptualizations of caring and discuss the relevance of incorporating theory into practice.

Watson's Theory of Caring

Watson [1] defines caring as: "the moral ideal of nursing whereby the end is protection, enhancement, and preservation of human dignity. Human caring involves values, a will and a commitment to care, knowledge, caring actions, and consequences. All of human caring is related to inter subjective human response to health-illness; environmental-personal interaction; a knowledge of the nurse caring process; self knowledge, knowledge of one's power and transaction limitations" (p. 501). Moreover, Watson posits that "the essence of the value of human care and caring may be futile unless it contributes to a philosophy of action. . . . The actual concrete action of caring can transcend the value (and pass it on). . . . The value of caring is grounded in the self-transcending creative nurse" (p. 52). She further believes that human-to-human caring interactions of nursing cannot be validated or understood using a "positivistic, deterministic, materialistic mind set" [1].

Watson [1] acknowledges the differences between traditional science and human science. They are as follows:

Traditional Science Content	Nursing Human Science for Caring
Normative	Ignative
Reductionistic	Transactional
Mechanistic	Metaphysical, Humanistic-contextual
Method-centered	Phenomena-centered
Disease-centered	Person-experience centered
Pathology-physiology, the physical body	Human responses to illness and personal meanings of human condition
Ethics of 'science'	Human-social ethics- morality
More quantitative	More qualitative
Absolutes, givens, laws	Relativism, probabilities
Human as object	Human as subject
Objective experiences	Subjective-intersubjective experiences
Facts	Experience, meaning
Nonethetic	Idiographic +/- nomothetic
Concrete-observable	Abstract- may or may not "be seen"

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Analytical

Science as product

Human = sum of parts etc.
 (bio-psycho-socio-cultural-spiritual-being)

"Real" is that which is measurable, observable, and knowable

Dialectical, philosophical, metaphysical

Science as creative process of discovery

Human = mind/body/spirit gestalt of whole being (not only more than sum of parts, but different)

"Real" is abstract, largely subjective as well as objective, but is may or may not ever be fully known, observable, fully measured, what is "real" holds mystery and unknowns yet to be discovered

A nurse is required to perform certain acts for her patient which are legally and ethically binding. Watson [1] posits that the value of human care and caring is more than the mere action of performance. Caring involves a sense of self identity and spirit of the person. It involves a pure sense of dedication and commitment to the patient. A specific action of caring may transcend the value because it is "grounded in the self-transcending creative nurse" [1].

The following are Watson's [1] eleven assumptions related to Human Care Values in Nursing:

1. Care and love are the most universal, the most tremendous, and the most mysterious of cosmic forces; they comprise the primal and universal psychic energy.
2. Often these needs are overlooked; or we know people need each other in loving and caring ways, but often we do not behave well toward each other. If our humanness is to survive, however, we need to become more caring and loving to nourish our humanity and evolve as a civilization and love together.
3. Since nursing is a caring profession, its ability to sustain its caring ideal and ideology in practice will affect the human development of civilization and determine nursing's contribution to society.

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Nursing The Practice Of Caring

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