

**Watson's Theory of Human Caring: A Framework for Addressing the Emotional Demands
of the Nursing**

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Nursing is a highly challenging yet fulfilling profession. Nurses often have to deal with emotionally challenging situations, such as working with complex patients, stressful work environments, busy schedules, understaffing, death, and dying, which will affect their emotional health (Kiel et al., 2020). These challenges can lead to mental stress, fatigue, helplessness, and anxiety among nurses and other medical personnel. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has only worsened things, intensifying the existing epidemic of compassion fatigue among nurses (Kiel et al., 2020). In this paper, I will examine the emotional demands of the nurse, a related concept used to describe these demands, and how Watson's theory of human caring relates to and addresses these emotional demands in nursing. Furthermore, I will explore how practicing self-care and applying Watson's theory of human caring can address these emotional demands and their limitations.

Problem Identification

Healthcare, emergency, and community service workers frequently develop compassion fatigue due to exposure to the traumatic experiences of their clients. They can negatively affect patient care and mental health, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, or depression (Cocker et al., 2016).

Nurses often face emotionally challenging situations such as dealing with complex patients, working in stressful environments, busy schedules, understaffing, death, and dying (Kiel et al., 2020). They must manage their emotions while empathizing with patients and families. These challenges will have an impact on their mental health and lead to stress, fatigue, helplessness, and anxiety. Kiel et al. (2020) identified an epidemic of non-stop action among nurses, leading to a chaotic work environment, resulting in nurses frequently skipping their

lunches and delaying bathroom breaks. Kiel et al. (2020) reported high rates of depression and suicide attempts among healthcare providers. Nurses often work extended shifts due to understaffing or call-ins, resulting in physical and emotional exhaustion. Linton et al. (2020) found that 68% of surveyed nurses prioritize patients' health, safety, and wellness above their own. Nurses may experience extreme levels of tension and preoccupation and develop secondary traumatic stress due to their high levels of emotional and physical engagement with patients they assist (Cocker et al., 2016).

As Watson once stated, "Nurses are a unique kind. Nurses have an insatiable need to care for others, which can be both their greatest strength and weakness" (Wentzell, 2017). While nurses need to care for others, it is vital for nurses not to neglect their needs and prioritize their health and well-being as well (Wentzell, 2017).

These are significant concerns for nurses, and it is essential to address these concerns related to the emotional demands of the job. Prioritizing self-care is one such opportunity for nurses, essential for maintaining good health and improving physical and mental outcomes, thus delivering compassionate and effective patient care.

Related Concept

Compassion fatigue is a related concept used to describe the emotional demands of the nursing job. Compassion fatigue is the exhaustion and withdrawal experienced by caregivers of ill or traumatized people over an extended period (Peters, 2018). In other words, it is the result of the emotional demands of the nursing job, which can take a toll on the well-being of the nurses. The emotional demand of a nursing job is the stress and pressure nurses face when attending to people's needs, problems, and suffering. It can lead to symptoms such as emotional exhaustion, cynicism, detachment, and reduced empathy (Peters, 2018).

According to Peters (2018), nurses often feel exhausted and distressed due to their exposure to sick and dying patients, which may lead to compassion fatigue. Peters (2018) added that nurses may lose interest in their work and even consider quitting when they do not establish clear boundaries, fail to care for themselves, or lack support from others. Peters (2018) stressed the significance of this issue, as we require more nurses to care for those in need.

Therefore, nurses must prioritize self-awareness and self-care to deliver compassionate and effective patient care. When nurses prioritize their self-care, they are better equipped to provide compassionately for patients.

Theory Identification

Watson's theory of human caring, which emphasizes the importance of self-care, will be utilized throughout the paper to address the emotional demands of nursing jobs. Watson's theory of human caring emphasizes that nursing involves facilitating therapeutic healing processes and nurturing relationships beyond the scope of nursing practices, such as tasks, procedures, treatments, and technology (Leone-Sheehan, 2022). To Watson, caring is the ethical principle determining the effectiveness of curative interventions (Leone-Sheehan, 2022). Watson's theory of human caring provides comprehensive guidance, encompassing basic needs and emotional support, fostering a harmonious nurse-patient relationship (Leone-Sheehan, 2022).

According to Watson's theory, self-care is essential as it helps us offer authentic caring and love to others (Linton et al., 2020). Two critical value assumptions of Watson's Caritas are that:

We have to learn how to offer caring, love, forgiveness, compassion, and mercy to ourselves before we can offer authentic caring and love to others and we also must treat ourselves with loving-kindness and equanimity, gentleness, and dignity before we can

accept, respect, and care for others within a professional caring-healing model. (Linton et al., 2020, 1694)

Watson's theory of human caring is based on fundamental assumptions that nurses must prioritize their physical, emotional, and mental well-being to effectively care for others, maintain emotional balance, and avoid burnout. Additionally, nursing is primarily concerned with human caring to establish caring relationships with patients to promote their well-being. Linton et al. (2020) stated that several caritas processes in the theory of human caring outline the holistic framework for nurses to practice caring for themselves and others to improve their mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual health.

Theory Analysis

Identification of Relationship to Problem

Watson's theory of human caring caritas processes, which are guidelines for creating a caring and healing environment, can be used by nurses to improve their self-care. The theory emphasizes the importance of intentional caring-healing techniques and therapies, such as music, visualization, breath work, aromatherapy, therapeutic touch, massage, reflexology, dream work, humor, play, journaling, poetry, art making, meditation, transpersonal teaching, dance, yoga, and movement, in managing work-related stress (Leone-Sheehan, 2022). Thus, nurses should practice self-care for their well-being and self-awareness of their own emotions and biases to better serve their patients and feelings, applying the theory of human caring. Some self-care strategies for nurses include maintaining a healthy lifestyle, engaging in relaxation techniques, seeking support from colleagues and loved ones, and establishing clear boundaries between work and personal life.

According to Chipu et al. (2021), Watson's theory of human caring caritas processes involves self-care through practicing loving-kindness towards oneself and others, building

trusting relationships, fostering spiritual practices, and developing empathy towards oneself and others. Chipu et al. (2021) encouraged nurses to make a place where they can heal and care for themselves and others, and they need to learn how to love, forgive, be kind, and accept themselves before they can do the same for others. Nurses must treat themselves fairly, with compassion, gentleness, and respect before providing care and respect to others (Chipu et al., 2021). Chipu et al. (2021) noted in their study that nurses should prioritize self-care by developing a nutrition, hygiene, exercise, and social contact routine, promoting stress management, self-worth, and resilience; they should seek therapy when overwhelmed before they provide care to patients. Nurses have a crucial role in caring for others, but taking care of themselves is equally important. However, when they are not feeling well or face physical, mental, or emotional challenges, it may negatively impact their ability to provide optimal care. Their well-being directly affects their quality of care, which may lead to medical errors, jeopardizing patient safety and care. Prioritizing their health and well-being while being compassionate towards themselves allows nurses to assist their patients better. By taking care of themselves, nurses can ensure they are in a better position to provide the best possible care to their patients. Watson's theory of human caring raises awareness of nurses' self-care needs and encourages implementing self-care strategies for promoting emotional, spiritual, social, and physical well-being.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Watson's theory of human caring highlights the significance of self-care for nurses to provide their emotional, spiritual, social, and physical well-being, enabling them to provide quality care to patients and value to their healthcare organizations. Self-care is highly regarded as beneficial for nurses in their profession, not just for nurses but also for patients and

organizations. Thus, nursing codes of ethics across the globe mandate self-care as a responsibility for nurses to ensure they protect and promote their health while delivering safe patient care (Linton et al., 2020).

Watson's theory of caring provides valuable support for nurses in self-care and promoting their physical and mental well-being. When nurses face shortages and high turnover rates, they often have to work longer hours, which can lead to burnout. While Watson's theory of human caring and its self-care practices can address many of the emotional demands that nurses face and help alleviate these issues, they do not address the underlying problem, specifically nurse shortages and high turnover. Organizations must proactively address nurse shortages and turnover to ensure their nursing staff's well-being and job satisfaction. Addressing these challenges is crucial in preventing nurse burnout and fatigue. Further investigation is required to understand better the nursing staff shortage and the related organizational difficulties.

Potential Impact

When nurses prioritize their self-care, they are better equipped to provide compassionate and effective patient care. Their well-being directly impacts their quality of care, which can lead to fewer medical errors and improved patient safety. Watson's theory of human caring emphasizes the importance of nurses practicing self-care. By fostering a culture of self-care and self-awareness, nurses become physically and mentally fit, resulting in better patient care. Nurse mentors, department heads, and everyone across the organizational structure in healthcare must embrace this culture of self-care and give nurses space for self-care, resulting in improved quality of care and higher patient satisfaction scores. Creating a culture of self-care can help address the emotional demands of nursing jobs. It can lead to happier and healthier nurses by promoting their physical and mental well-being and enabling them to provide better patient care.

This, in turn, can significantly reduce nurse turnover and result in significant cost savings for healthcare organizations. According to the American Nurses Association Health Risk Appraisal, nurses provide optimal patient care when they are in good health (Linton et al., 2020). The American Nurses Association Code of Ethics for Nurses emphasizes the importance of self-care for nurses to provide better patient care (Linton et al., 2020). However, only a few healthcare organizations have prioritized the self-care needs of their nurses despite the benefits it can bring to both the nurses and the organization.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has discussed the causes and impacts of the emotional demands of the nursing profession and compassion fatigue, a state of physical, emotional, and mental state, a related concept that describes this demand. Watson's theory of human caring provides a valuable framework to address the nursing profession's emotional demands and help nurses cope. Watson's theory emphasizes the importance of caring for oneself and others to promote healing and well-being. It provides a valuable framework for nurses to prioritize self-care, which is essential for maintaining good health and improving physical and mental outcomes, thus delivering compassionate and effective patient care. Applying Watson's carative factors can enhance nurses' emotional health and resilience through self-care strategies. Nurses can provide more efficient and compassionate patient care by caring for themselves. However, Watson's theory of human caring also has some limitations, needing to address the underlying issue, specifically nurse shortages and high turnover from the organization's perspective. Therefore, further study is necessary to understand better the nursing staff shortage and the related organizational difficulties, which are also significant causes of nurse compassion fatigue.

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