



Innovations in Holistic Nursing: The Role of *Nurse Coach*

by DEBORAH MCELLIGOTT DNP, AHN-BC, HWNC-BC, CDE

“I don’t want to work with all the red tape and bureaucracy in the hospital! Do you have any jobs for a holistic nurse?” While many institutions support the concept of holistic nursing (as all nursing is fundamentally holistic), the defined staff role of a holistic nurse consultant or practitioner in a healthcare institution is still rare. With decreased insurance reimbursement, increased budgetary concerns, and diminishing grant money, the holistic nurse position is sometimes considered expendable and may be one of the first jobs cut when funds are depleted or leadership changes. The role of Nurse Coach could open new doors for holistic nurses to practice to the fullest extent of their potential, while becoming an indispensable part of the interprofessional team.

When the Institute of Medicine (IOM, 2010) recommended that nurses should practice to the fullest extent of their potential, the spark for innovations in holistic nursing occurred. Innovation often refers to a new use of an existing process focused on meeting a specific need.

In response to this recommendation, qualities of the holistic nurse were molded in an innovative fashion into the professional Nurse Coach role. Although nursing has been supporting wellness initiatives for centuries, a formal title, definition, scope and competencies for nurse coaching did not yet exist. National holistic nursing leaders

seized the opportunity and formed consensus to develop the professional Nurse Coach scope of practice and competencies (Hess, Dossey, Southard, Luck, Schaub, & Bark, 2013). This occurred (over a three-year period and a six-step process) through dialogue with various organizations including: the American Nurses Association (ANA), the

American Holistic Nurses Association (AHNA), and the American Holistic Nurses Credentialing Corporation (AHNCC). In January 2013, the AHNA, along with 20 other national and international organizations, endorsed *The Art and Science of Nurse Coaching: The Provider's Guide to Coaching Scope and Competencies* (Hess, et al., 2013). This document provides:

- Scope of practice and competencies for nurse coaching,
- Foundational criteria and a process for the Nurse Coach certification exam (i.e. educational training, content, skills, practice hours, supervision and testing organization/certification titles), and
- Definition of the Nurse Coach (see box at right).

AHNCC's Nurse Coach examination was first held in January 2013 and administered by the Professional Testing Corporation (PTC). The exam, is offered four times a year for a two-week period of time in more than 400 locations.

Nurse Coaching & Holistic Nursing

How does the innovative role of nurse coach align with the role of the holistic nurse? First, grounded in nursing theories such as those of Nightingale, Orem, Rogers, Watson, Barrett, Brenner and Dossey, nurse coaching is also an art and a science. The Nurse Coach process is grounded in holistic nursing practice, values and competencies (Hess et al., 2013; AHNA & ANA, 2013). Through the use of therapeutic presence, the professional Nurse Coach works with the client to develop, reach and maintain client goals. The client is the expert, and the coach uses skills such as deep listening, powerful questions, motivational interviewing, imagery, meditation, presence, story etc. Nurse coaching and holistic nursing both involve whole person healing as a goal.

Relationship Focused

The very role of the Nurse Coach designates time spent in relationship with

What is a Nurse Coach?

“The professional Nurse Coach is a registered nurse who integrates coaching competencies into any setting or specialty area of practice to facilitate a process of change or development that assists individuals or groups to realize their potential... The Nurse Coach works with the whole person, using principles and modalities that integrate body-mind-emotion-spirit-environment” (Hess et al., 2013, p. 1).

the client or patient. While this time is crucial for development of the therapeutic relationship, nurse coaches may occasionally use short-focused episodes of “laser coaching techniques” when time is constrained. This makes coaching a powerful tool for nurses even in fast-paced healthcare environments. It is recognized that coaching is not for everyone—you can't force a person to be coached; this is for a select group of patients, but they may appear across the spectrum of care. Areas prime for nurse coaching include the following clients/patients who are:

- newly diagnosed, or coping with chronic disease
- facing difficult decisions such as end of life, surgery, discharge or transition of care,
- seeking behavior change or lifestyle modification,
- facing life/family transitions.

Community coaching involves working with local leaders and organizations towards systemic change. This is also an area of opportunity for nurses, who play a fundamental role in health promotion and community wellness.

While holistic nursing always recognizes the client's/patient's inner wisdom, this focus is further emphasized in the coaching process—the client's/patient's need drives the development of his/her self-care goals. The Nurse Coach does not give “patient orders” or provide education in the traditional manner, but instead helps the patient

formulate goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timed-lined: “SMART” objectives (Frey & Osterloh, 2002). Coaching models refer to the spirit of Motivational Interviewing (MI) and Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as ways of relating to the patient and impacting outcomes. These are only two of many theories used in nurse coaching. Guided by nursing and social science theories, the Nurse Coach may choose from many integrative and holistic modalities to individualize the care of their clients/patients.

Self-Development Emphasis

The role of the Nurse Coach honors and is dependent on the therapeutic presence of a holistic nurse, which is nurtured from years of study and practice involving personal reflection and self-development. The coaching process, like holistic nursing, is enhanced by self-development of the nurse. This includes four areas—self-reflection, self-assessment, self-evaluation and self-care—all of which are congruent with the scope and standards of holistic nursing practice (AHNA & ANA, 2013). Self-care is vital to the Nurse Coach's therapeutic presence and ability to assist the client/patient with goals, while considering culture, health literacy, family and community—all part of the person's integral whole.

Nurses: The Logical Choice

As other professions and lay coaches were vying to be coaches within the healthcare setting, nurses were revealed as the logical and best solution to the healthcare crisis. The Nurse Coach can embody the skills of a health, wellness or fitness coach depending on training, certification and skills. As the most trusted profession, nurses easily develop therapeutic relationships with clients/patients. Not only do they know how to work with an interdisciplinary team, but they are also accustomed to caring for the whole patient, family and community. Familiar with the issues and challenges

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facing individuals, nurses possess the knowledge, values, intention and skills to empower clients/patients and to facilitate change (IOM, 2010).

In the outpatient arena, the field of coaching in general is dramatically increasing as we attempt to address the numerous chronic diseases that are influenced by poor lifestyle choices. While various nursing roles are in existence in this area, the Nurse Coach role easily moves across the care spectrum and may occur in: workplace/occupational wellness, school/university wellness, and community organizations and settings, in either an individual or group format.

We now have a holistic nursing role in a familiar word: *Coaching*. The embodiment of the Nurse Coach role does not mean that the nurse must leave the acute care job; it is an avenue of entry and practice, an additional knowledge base and skill set that the nurse brings to a demanding role.

Looking Toward the Future

The innovative role of Nurse Coach, clearly identified and grounded in theory, must be supported with evidence-based practice and ongoing research. Data collection and validation tools are needed to demonstrate the value and effectiveness of nurse coaching. One tool, the Integrative Health and Wellness Assessment™ (IHWA) offered by the International Nurse Coach Association (INCA) is a method for coaching clients and collecting outcome measurements (Dossey, Luck, & Schaub, 2014). Additional research validating the benefits of nurse coaching will open doors for us to practice to the fullest extent of our role as holistic nurses, maintain a viable income, and become a valued part of the interprofessional team.

As we form communities to increase the evidence for our practice, opportunities will develop to expand the “spirit of holistic nursing” through the Nurse Coach role, integrating our knowledge, therapeutic presence,

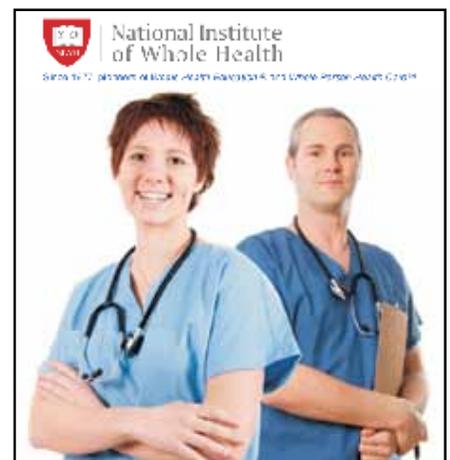
expanded state of consciousness, and self-development. It is now up to us to claim our Nurse Coach role in the future of health care. Together, we are expanding the awareness and creating possibilities for many nurses who feel trapped in their current roles, unable to see the brilliant flame. Let’s light the way to a happier, healthier, and more caring nurse, workplace, community and world.

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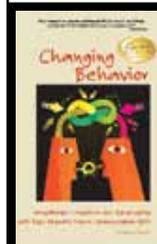
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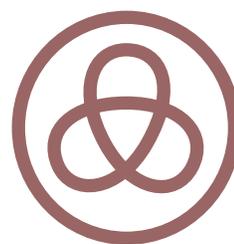
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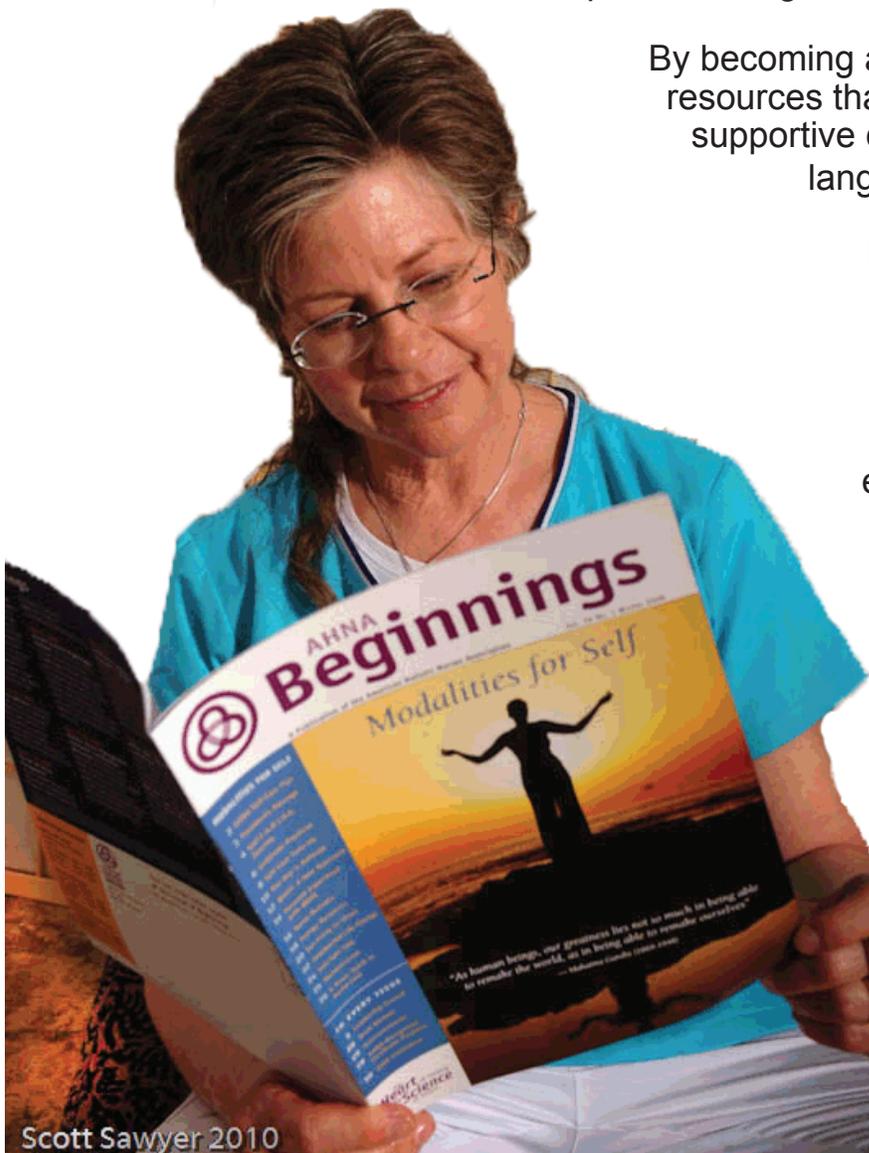
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