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Research Hypothesis in Healthcare Academics' Mind, Body and Soul Wellness: The Role of Nature's Influence

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Editorial

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INTRODUCTION

There is a looming threat to the healthcare system in the United States (U.S.) specifically involving the profession of Nursing. The overall demand for 3.24 million nurses (a 19% increase) during the next 10 years in the U.S. is predicted to fall short in supply^[1]. The supply growth is only expected to be 6% during the next 10 years; therefore, leaving a sizeable gap (13%) in the number of nurses needed to care for the predicted increased number of individuals over 60 years-old. It is estimated, individuals over the age of 60-years in 2030 will be "large" and nursing care will be in high demand^[1]. Therefore, it is critical to look at the self-care practices of nurses in order for them to remain healthy and strong in the workforce. Moreover, if nurses start to invest time in practices that foster an environment of health and wellness for themselves they will be able to have a direct influence on their patients. In turn, patients will perhaps need less care in their adult years based on the professional role-modeling and instruction of healthy self-care practices. However, it is well known nurses and other healthcare professionals suffer from the deleterious effects of stress.

Shapiro et al. purport the "stress" associated with the healthcare system has a negative effect on healthcare professionals' wellness^[2]. Reports of depression, decreased job satisfaction, disruption of relationships, psychological distress, and suicide have been cited^[2]. Furthermore, a decrease in attention span, reduction of concentration, impaired decision-making skills, and a negative effect on patient/provider relationships is also noted^[2]. There is clearly a need to start looking at how healthcare team members care for themselves because their identified self-care practices really matter and ultimately have a domino effect on patients and families.

I want to take it a step further and propose nurse faculty members, employed in Schools of Nursing across the U.S., reflect and identify their healthy self-care practices. Evidence based nursing research may assist nurse faculty to look inward and assess their self-care practices, communicate methods of building healthy academic communities, and how students perceive them in their classrooms. As a promoter of "wellness," high-career satisfaction, stress reduction, and increased subjective happiness, it is time to look at the true potential of complementary therapies as self-care modalities for nurse faculty, students, and ultimately patients and their family members. Therefore, a research study looking at the use of "nature therapy" (Ecotherapy) for nurse faculty members' perceived stress, career satisfaction, and subjective happiness is being proposed. When faculty members "stress less," students are more apt to effectively communicate with faculty and this increase in connection and ease enhances students' learning and, potentially faculty career satisfaction, subjective happiness, and teaching effectiveness will be heightened.

Despite advances in medical science, there is an increasing interest in complementary therapies, such as mindfulness meditation, Ecotherapy, yoga practices, massage therapy, and acupuncture^[3]. Historically speaking, "excellence" in mind and body dates back to the Ancient Greek athletes and, the Roman poet, Juvenal, explored the use of prayer for a healthy mind in a

rigorous body ^[4]. “Arête,” meaning a person of the “highest effectiveness,” was used in reference to cognition and motivation to study and learn in Homeric times ^[5]. Recently, there is well-reported awareness of the importance to find a healthy balance in relating all three of these well-known concepts by professionals who lead busy lives.

Ecotherapy pertains to human healing associated with a strong association with the natural earth. Clinebell also coined it as “green therapy” and “earth-centered therapy” and prefers to associate it as encompassing “ecopsychology,” which is the study of the human psychological relationship with nature ^[6]. Ecopsychology provides theoretical and cultural bedrock for ecotherapeutic practice and, therefore, ecotherapy is considered a functional ecopsychology. To appreciate and garner what the natural world may offer in the promotion of health at the levels of the mind, body, and soul there is space for feasibility research and clinical trial proposals. Selhub and Logan explain how researchers are now looking at the positive effects of nature on the brain from a scientific point-of-view ^[7]. These researchers extol the great benefits afforded from the elements of water, animals, and vegetation. Moreover, Selhub and Logan demonstrate how exposure to nature has a direct effect on reducing the stress hormone cortisol and human blood pressure while increasing the parasympathetic nervous system that creates an overall calming effect.

Currently, there are no studies on the implementation of Ecotherapy on nurse faculty members’ levels of perceived stress, career satisfaction, and subjective happiness. This editorial is a working hypothesis to further explore research and the potential application of this ancient relationship with the natural environment. Exact types and doses of nature therapy will need to be researched and an exhaustive literature review conducted. In closing, John Muir reminds us: “The fragrance with which one is feasted in the woods is, like music, derived from a thousand untraceable sources...the whole air vibrates with myriad voices blended that we cannot analyze. So also we breathe the fragrant violets, the rosy pine and spicy fir, the rich, invigorating aroma of plushy bogs in which a thousand herbs are soaked...” ^[7, p.81].

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