

## **Alternative Nursing Practice**

### *Creating Inroads for Integrative Healthcare*

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*With increasing client and professional interest in alternative and complementary care, registered nurses are incorporating alternative and complementary modalities into their practices outside the traditional health care setting. Alternative nursing is defined using nursing theory and models of assessment, reflection and holism. Nursing and the concept of holism provides a framework for the practice of complementary/alternative modalities inside and outside the institutional setting. Further, charting of nursing diagnosis and nursing interventions with alternative/complementary therapies demonstrate how they are incorporated into the nursing process. Examples provided are a partial list of certification resources that are advantageous in a professional alternative nursing practice.*

**Key words:** *alternative and complementary modalities, alternative nursing practice, nursing theory, nursing diagnosis, lay alternative practitioner.*

Reviews of holistic nursing web sites support the premise that registered nurses are incorporating complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) into their practices outside of traditional nursing occupations (“www.naturalhealers.com,” 2005). While some institutions have the monetary capital to encourage nurses to integrate CAM practices into their workplace, most do not. For many administrators it is a simple equation: if insurance covers the cost of complementary and alternative modalities, the

scientifically researchable ones are integrated; if insurance doesn't pay for them, they are not incorporated.

Scores of individuals pursue careers in nursing because they yearn to work in a compassionate manner, but traditional nursing positions are often perceived as stressful and the environments uncaring. In some work places, the nurses' quality of living perspectives are often overlooked or not considered important.

Many studies have addressed the dissatisfaction that nurses find in their jobs and some quit their mainstream nursing positions so that they can work in an environment that is more satisfying. These departing nurses will tell you that they want to find an outlet to more fully express their innate talents. They may even seek an education outside the nursing profession in a related caring field such as psychology and theology. They seek situations that match their value systems, and harmonize with their holistic beliefs. They want the freedom to practice caring in a way that seems more natural to them.

Large numbers of nurses are attracted to CAM modalities but they must be creative when integrating their healing techniques into their practices outside of the mainstream workplace. The typical alternative nursing practices include such modalities as aromatherapy, herbal medicine, energy work, meditation, guided imagery, medical massage and craniosacral therapy to name just a few. ("[www.ahna.org](http://www.ahna.org)", 2005) Nurses with alternative practices can be found in business and home based offices as well as in beauty and health settings such as spas, cruise ships, and wellness centers.

### **Alternative Nursing Practice Defined**

According the fact sheet at the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM), complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) refers to philosophies and approaches that Western medicine does not ordinarily accept, use, study, understand or make available. Complementary medicine or practices are used together with conventional medicine. Alternative medicine or practices are those that are used *in place of* traditional methods (“[www.nccam.nih.gov/health/watiscam/](http://www.nccam.nih.gov/health/watiscam/)”, 2005). Alternative nursing uses the science of traditional nursing education and nursing theory as a framework for complementary and alternative healing modalities in alternative nursing practices. Alternative nurses build upon the traditional practice of nursing by adding healing modalities that are currently outside mainstream health care. Staying within state guidelines, nurses practice esoteric skills and document this care within the nurses’ scope of practice. This moves their practice outside of and *in place of* traditional nursing care.

### **Regulation of Practice**

The practice of nursing is regulated by each state and the ability of nurses to bring alternative and complementary modalities into a nursing framework depends upon how each state defines CAM and integrates it into the profession. Nurses wanting to work outside the current traditional health care system while maintaining a nursing license must contact their state’s board of nursing and ask for a contact person who can help with the legalities of setting up an alternative nursing practice (Amdall Thompson, 2003).

## **Nursing Theory in Practice**

In her article, *Nursing as a Context for Alternative/Complementary Modalities*, Noreen Cavan Frisch, Ph.D. (2001), explains how nursing theories, that form conceptual models for practice, and taxonomies such as nursing diagnoses, provide a unique and discipline specific view of professional care. Theories help to articulate new worldviews, and they suggest how nurses think about care. Each theory addresses concepts of the nursing paradigm in different ways. For instance, Dr. Callista Roy's theories asks the nurse to explore the relationships between the client, the health of the client and their significant others, and the environment where healing takes place (Roy, 1999). Such theories ensure that the nursing practice is consistent with recognized nursing principles and values.

Nursing theory provides the concepts, language and worldview to conceptualize nursing care and, at the same time, a framework that tells how, why and when to use alternative and complementary modalities. As CAM modalities are documented according to theory and with the standard taxonomies, they are then acknowledged in peer-reviewed journals and the modalities are slowly brought into the domain of nursing activities. For instance, Margaret Neuman's theory of pattern recognition gives the nurse a conceptual framework for applying modalities that are based on recognizing patterns of archetypal expression in such insight-producing therapies as astrology, Tarot counseling, guided imagery, and dream interpretation. Neuman's theory explains how client insights lead to an expanded awareness that is a necessary component of growth and development (Neuman, 1999) This fits nicely with what health psychology researchers like Jeanne Achterberg and others have told us for over thirty years---that careful attention to the

development of the mind and spirit are what is needed for optimal psychological and physical healing to occur (Achterberg, 1985)

Alternative and complementary modalities that are incorporated into an alternative nursing practice that is consistent with nursing theory are given significance by those theories. For instance, Martha Roger's theoretical contribution brings reflection upon human and environmental energy fields and guides the practice so that the nurse can incorporate concepts of energy exchange such as Reiki and Therapeutic Touch for the benefit of client healing (Neuman, 1999). Jean Watson's philosophy and theory of human caring opens the door for deep relating in an authentic relationship and facilitates nursing's expansion into the spiritual aspects of the person being cared for. In part, Watson's theory makes ministerial duties an accepted part of the nursing domain (Barrett, 2000).

Just as nursing theory is used to thoughtfully understand and interpret a nurse's action, the actions need proper documentation in order to incorporate them into a professional context.

### **Documentation in an Alternative Practice**

Documentation of nursing care using CAM modalities makes it clear that the care provided is practiced within the scope of the nursing profession. Using taxonomies such as NANDA Classification of Nursing Diagnoses makes a statement of client problems and nursing concerns as well as opportunities to promote wellness. As nurses use the classification system they are accomplishing three important things: identification of work as within the scope of professional nursing, appropriate documentation of care, and

adding to a body of knowledge for nurses to use about specific interventions (Cavan Frisch, 2001). The chart below is an example of how nursing diagnoses (together with nursing theory) guide the interpretation of the client’s situation and the selection of appropriate nursing care.

<b>Selected Nursing diagnoses with Possible Complementary and Alternative Interventions</b>		
<b>Nursing Diagnosis</b>	<b>Nursing Intervention</b>	<b>Rationale</b>
Post Trauma Syndrome	guided imagery, hypnosis	to decrease anxiety
Readiness for Enhanced Knowledge	spiritual support, astrology, art therapy	to facilitate enhanced self-esteem
Hopelessness	spiritual support, tarot counseling, guided imagery	to increase belief in transcendent values
Readiness for Enhanced Self-Concept	meditation, dreamwork	to increase actions that are congruent with expressed thoughts and feelings
Energy Field Disturbance	energy work such as Therapeutic Touch, Reiki	to facilitate postoperative healing

The documents of nurses who use CAM chart the traditional assessment phase that begins with first contact with the client. Nurses cordially greet the client, while conducting a visual scan for clues about health and hygiene. They tune into intuitive sensations at the moment of the first encounter, and continue to seek further evidence for support. During the initial interview the nurse gains a perspective on the philosophy or religion the family values are based upon. This forms the foundation for the nurse to gain an understanding of clients world, from their point of view, as the nurse listens to their

biographical stories. The nurse furthers her understanding by paying attention to the client's emotional state and asking about that person's experiences and beliefs about health.

Eventually, the nurse and the client plan interventions that fit a client's perceived needs. The nurse plans holistically, considering the individual's values when creating treatments that treat the whole person. They discuss things like diet and exercise changes, visualization, and various religious and non-religious rituals such as prayer and meditation. The care given is documented in a nursing context using nursing diagnosis, goal directed actions, and measurable outcomes.

### **Observations of Lay Alternative Practitioners**

Generally speaking, unlicensed alternative practitioners in the healing arts are intelligent and gifted. The masters among them are usually self taught and have focused upon their subject and perfected their craft. Some among the alternative community have much to offer the nursing profession and should be given consideration when offering health professionals continuing education.

Like professional practitioners, lay people may not reach their full potential as healers until they have been practicing their healing techniques for 10 to 20 years. However, careful attention should be used when consulting a lay practitioner. A good rule of thumb might be to consider the lay person an apprentice if they have less than 10 years experience in the techniques that they offer. If they have less than 3 years experience, they should not be taken seriously as they may be in an idealistic stage or someone looking to cash in on the health care market.

Further, when working with the lay alternative practitioner, keep in mind that they are not required to employ the same professional guidelines that the licensed nurse must follow. The lay person's customs, conduct and knowledge may not be the same as the trained licensed nurse.

### **Integration within the Nursing Profession**

Nursing theorists have made a difference in the way that the profession is perceived, experienced and practiced, but because the nursing field has been slow to change, some nurses have sought higher education degrees outside of the nursing profession. In part, this has enhanced the growth of the ever expanding role of the professional nurse. Pioneering alternative nurses explore esoteric therapeutic modalities and then introduce them to nursing in language that can be understood. Modalities such as astrology and Tarot then become integrated with traditional ones to become a part of the new holistic paradigm of complementary and alternative care.

Although we have a long way to go before we place a fully integrated profession within the walls of our institutional workplaces, traditional practice and alternative practice nurses can be proud of what they are accomplishing within the hallowed halls of the nursing profession.

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The following is a partial list of complementary and alternative interventions that are advantageous in an alternative nursing practice. All courses have continuing education credits from accredited nursing organizations.

Polarity Healthcare Seminars  
Polarity therapy, kinesiology, chakras,  
craniosacral  
Randall Gibson, M.Ed, CMT  
(330)-836-5060  
[www.polarityhealthcare.com](http://www.polarityhealthcare.com)

Beyond Ordinary Nursing  
Susan Ezra, RN, HNC  
Terry Reed, RN, MS, HNC  
Guided imagery  
(650) 570-6157  
[www.integrativeimagery.com](http://www.integrativeimagery.com)

Healing Touch Certification Program  
Energy therapy  
(303)-989-7982  
[www.healingtouch.net](http://www.healingtouch.net)

Archetypal Tarot Counseling  
Toni Gilbert, RN, MA, HNC  
Tarot counseling, dream interpretation  
(541) 327-7749  
[www.tonigilbert.com](http://www.tonigilbert.com)

Aromatherapy for Health Professionals  
R. J. Buckle Associates  
(215) 546-3122  
[www.rjbuckle.com](http://www.rjbuckle.com)

Astrology for Nurses  
Samten Williams, RN, BSN(513) 561-0757  
[www.samtenwilliams.com](http://www.samtenwilliams.com)

The Institute for Meditation and  
Psychotherapy  
(978) 526-4095  
[www.meditationandpsychotherapy.org](http://www.meditationandpsychotherapy.org)

Wild Iris Medical Education  
Herbal Medicine  
Alan Clark, MD  
(707) 937-0518  
[www.nursingceu.com](http://www.nursingceu.com)

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After many years of using Tarot cards in her holistic nursing practice she has found them to be a highly effective form of therapy. She sees clients in crisis due to illness, injury or difficult life issues. She discovered that the cards' archetypal imagery can be used to accurately reflect her client's present state of mind.

As a holistic nurse and transpersonal counselor, Gilbert explores deeper levels of consciousness of the mind, body and the spirit, which, as we know, affects the health of the body. This knowledge helps her guide clients toward their higher psychological and spiritual potential, helping them to access their inner wisdom in the healing of emotional wounds. Towards this end, she relies upon the archetypal imagery of Tarot. In combination with the transpersonal counseling process, the cards have become one of her most efficient tools.

*Toni is one of thousands of health professionals that act as a bridge between mainstream medicine and alternative and complimentary therapies. Her on line journal the **Alternative Journal of Nursing** gives pioneers a forum to discuss their esoteric discoveries and how they integrate them into a health care practice. You can reach Toni through her web site at [www.tonigilbert.com](http://www.tonigilbert.com)*