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The Benefits of Self-Care For Nursing Faculty

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Nursing faculty burnout is a common phenomenon in the literature [1]. Chronic work stress is associated with exhaustion, social withdraw, poor health outcomes, and burnout [2]. The effect of self-care on burnout prevention is also well documented. The World Health Organization defines self-care as “activities individuals, families, and communities undertake with the intention of enhancing health, preventing disease, limiting illness and restoring health” [3].

One may wonder, how nurse faculty burnout originates? Nurses work in demanding, ever-changing healthcare environments, often neglecting their needs. Seen as a “badge of honor,” nurses choose to put patient and staff needs first and work an entire shift without taking a lunch break. Over time behaviors from the clinical arena transfer into the academic setting as nurse faculty work 12-14 hours a day managing academic role expectations. Nursefaculty often lack healthy boundaries regarding teaching demands, professional development, scholarship and service requirements. They are proficient at educating students on the much-needed self-care strategies of healthy nutrition, adequate sleep, daily exercise, and meditation; however, many do not practice what they teach. Consumer demand drives many faculties to work 50+ hours perweek to stay ahead. The impact results in job dissatisfaction, faculty turnover, and ultimately a lack of nursing faculty to teachstudent nurses, which reduces the number of students a programcan admit [1]. The “Do-as-I-say, not-as-I-do” philosophy of facultycan inhibit nursing students from learning effective self-carestrategies they need to maintain a healthy career.

The practice of self-care by nursing faculty is noteworthy. Incorporating self-care into one’s lifestyle is a way to promote resilience and prevent burnout [4]. Moreover, Orem’s self-care model notes, self-care is required daily by individuals “to regulate their own functioning.” Self-care promotes a positive health status. The ability to apply self-care is affected by age, health status, mental development, and environment. Self-care performance must be implemented daily to foster a positive health status. The American Nurse Association addresses self-care value in the 2014 Code of Ethics for Nurses in the fifth provision interpretive statement. The nurse owes the same duties to self as to others, including the responsibility to promote health and safety, preserve wholeness of character and integrity, maintain competence, and continue to pursue personal and professional growth [5].

The practice of self-care is not new. Centuries ago, individuals and communities had the duty of self-care for self-preservation; disease treatment was limited with few options [6]. Today, through simple self-assessment, self-awareness, and reflection, one can begin to initiate change [7]. For example, through self-assessment, one can recognize more daily exercise is needed and develop a plan for ways to increase daily steps (i.e., take the stairs or park further from the building).

For self-care to be a priority, a culture change needs to occur and be role modeled from the nurse leaders. Educational awareness in the form of professional development and selecting a few simple strategies such as making healthy food choices, getting adequate sleep/ rest, increasing daily movement, or water hydration is an excellent place to start. To initiate a change on campus, a lead-person can be designated to research self-care possibilities and educate faculty on current trends [6]. Faculty could draft a simple plan and vote to implement it as a team. Through this initiative, faculty become role models for nursing students.

It has been said that nurses make the “worst” patients [8]. Nursing faculty may fit in this category as well. Self-care is essential for positive health outcomes and job satisfaction. Nursing faculty need to be aware of their own needs and be role models for nursing students. Through practicing daily self-care, faculty and students will cause a paradigm shift toward health promotion and life satisfaction for the whole campus.

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