

A Nurse's Call to Care
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I felt a call to be a nurse at a young age and that inner sense that nursing was the right career path for my life's work never wavered. I have been very fortunate with rich and excellent educational, clinical, and academic opportunities to realize that call. As I reflect on a now long and rewarding career, I am filled with gratitude for all that a nursing career has offered to me.

There are few other professionals who have the opportunities we have, as nurses, to deeply touch the lives of others. As nurses, we are with patients and families during some of the most important moments of their lives. We are there at birth; we care for people throughout their lifetimes – promoting health and preventing illness, when possible, and providing care through illness, when necessary. We are there at death. We offer healing. Healing is an important word to us as nurses - healing comes from a root word that means “to make whole”. We heal as we cure, at times. More often, we help our patients to become as whole as possible as they cope with chronic illness or adapt to the challenges and limitations imposed by injury or disease. We help our patients to become whole by seeing them as whole and worthy of our regard and respect, whatever their circumstance. We help our patients to become whole with our knowledge and skill, but also very importantly, with our compassion, caring, and presence.

In my clinical practice as a psychiatric clinical nurse specialist, I have focused on the intersection of serious medical illness and mental health, and the power of excellent nursing care to address suffering during critical moments in the lives of patients and families. For the past fifteen years I have practiced part-time as a psychiatric clinical nurse specialist on the Inpatient Oncology and Bone Marrow Transplant Unit at Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH). In my role at MGH I reflect with the nurses on their care and consult with them on the patients who are experiencing high degrees of challenge and distress. I see patients and families with the nurses to offer additional nursing presence and frequently to offer a nursing intervention called Therapeutic Touch to promote comfort and relaxation for patients.

It is a privilege to work with the nurses at MGH. Each day I am on the unit, I am moved by the care I witness. Nurses care for the demanding physical and technical needs of their very ill patients with skill and expertise. What distinguishes their care as excellent and transformative is their capacity to be truly present with patients and to hold them with the highest regard and compassion as they offer technically expert care. They know their patients very well and commit to being with them throughout their journeys of serious, and potentially life-limiting, illness with caring and love. Those journeys are often arduous and difficult. Yet with their nurses' care, those journeys can be transformative. Serious illness invites deep reflection on meaning and life. The compassionate presence of the nurses offers patients and families healing possibility and an expansive recognition of what is truly important and meaningful in their lives, whatever the course and outcome of their illness. When the outcome is death, the nurses' care offers dignity, meaning, comfort, and peace.

In my academic practice at Simmons College, my goal is to assist students to recognize the transformative power of excellent nursing and support their skill and confidence as they learn to address the needs of their patients and create healing possibility. I teach a course each year focused on palliative and end of life care based on the End of Life Nursing Education Consortium (ELNEC) curriculum. The course is a joy to teach because it offers an opportunity to focus with students on the essence of nursing practice and enhances their understanding and comfort addressing the needs and suffering of patients and families. The offering of skillful and compassionate care is a gift for the patient and also for the nurse. There is no higher calling than to bring compassion to the world and nurses have that opportunity with every patient they encounter.

As Associate Dean and a leader within the School of Nursing and Health Sciences at Simmons, I view my role as helping to create a community of caring scholars. A community where every faculty member is supported in their teaching of the science and art of healing practice and every student is held in regard as they learn the skills and beauty of their chosen professional paths. Teaching and learning are exquisitely demanding. When faculty and students honor the vulnerability and risk inherent in true growth, the teaching and learning become transformative.

For the past ten years I have had the privilege of traveling regularly to Bangladesh. Under the leadership of Dr. Bimalangshu Dey, I have explored nursing practice and education in Bangladesh with nursing leaders and participated with MGH colleagues in offering the Enhanced Specialized Nurse Training Program (ESNTP) at Dhaka Medical College Hospital. It has been one of the greatest honors of my career to be warmly received by nursing leaders and nurses in Bangladesh and participate in the sharing and exchange of nursing knowledge with colleagues across the world. Our recent teaching has focused on the nursing care of bone marrow transplant and oncology patients. A focus now on palliative and end of life care is a natural extension of our recent teaching. It is an honor to be offering the ELNEC curriculum to nursing colleagues in Bangladesh through the generous support of the Nusrat and Tahsin Aman and the Ayat Skill Development Centre.