**Examining the Health of Frontline Nurses**

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**Introduction**

Nurses educate and advocate for patients and families to practice healthy behaviors. Yet, as a group, nurses are recognized to have less-than-ideal health practices. This study examined the health behaviors of frontline nurses, who provide direct care to patients and families at hospital bedside or ambulatory clinics.

**Background**

Healthy behaviors are foundational to holistic wellbeing. In her writings, Florence Nightingale encouraged nurses to be role models for patients by attending to their personal health. The value of healthy self-care is especially relevant, given the aging nurse workforce. Along with diet, exercise and preventable risks (i.e., tobacco use) health promotion includes attention to social, emotional, and spiritual dimensions.

Research findings describe many nurses as fatigued, with irregular diets and inadequate exercise. Nurses' self-reports of high stress levels are linked with self-reports of poor health, while work environment ratings were not predictive of health ratings. While many employers offer health classes and fitness centers, few studies have reported the effectiveness of the strategies for direct care nurses.

**Aims**

This study examined frontline nurses' reports of health behaviors and frequency of practices, as an initial phase of a health promotion program for frontline nurses. The aims are to:

- Describe nurses' reports of health behaviors
- Examine relationships between personal characteristics and health behaviors.

The study’s framework drew on the Artinian Intersystem Model, which emphasizes identifying meaningful and manageable interventions with participants.

**Methods**

This study took place at a 240-bed medical center in northeast Pennsylvania.

- Descriptive design, using a convenience sample
- Inclusion: RNs and LPNs in direct care positions, at bedside or ambulatory clinic settings

Following IRB approval, nurses were emailed an invitation to participate.

- A link to the e-survey was contained within the email
- Required 10-15 minutes to complete
- Consent was implied with submission of survey

**Tools.** Self-care behaviors were examined using the Health-Promoting Lifestyle Profile (HPLP).

- Includes 52 statements about health behaviors, rated by frequency (1 = never to 4 = routine)
- Responses are summed to calculate a total score and 6 subscales: Health Responsibility, Nutrition, Physical Activity, Stress Management, Interpersonal Relations and Spiritual Growth
- Validity is established; in this study, reliability coefficients ranged from 0.64 (Interpersonal Relations) to 0.94 (Total Score)

Six items, designed by study team, collected demographics and qualitative comments about personal health behaviors.

**Analysis.** Variations in HPLP scores were examined according to personal characteristics. Analyses were conducted using ANOVA and post-hoc contrasts with Hochberg’s GT2 procedure to adjust for different group sizes. Content analysis was used to examine comments about professional practice.

**Results**

Data were collected from 160 nurses (21% response rate). Most described themselves as a RN (84%), working full-time and not currently enrolled in a nursing program.

**Qualitative comments related to personal health behaviors**

- "...finding it very difficult, between working nights, caring for children and looking after needs of elderly parents, to find time to tend to my own needs. I know better in theory, very difficult to put into practice."
- "At times, it is hard to transition into my personal life and leave the work day behind."
- "I have an infant so his health is my priority right now, not my own."
- "Night shift work hinders healthy lifestyle."
- "...finding it difficult to achieve a work-life balance."

**Discussion**

Participants reported moderate levels of healthy behaviors. Contrary to expectations, self-care behaviors did not vary according to nurses' age.

The healthier diets that were reported by older nurses may reflect fewer competing priorities, health conditions that require dietary strategies or an increased awareness of the impact of lifestyle choices.

The findings suggest that nurses' focus on others is internalized. Caring for others must be balanced with caring for self – we must acknowledge our own needs.

This survey and results have generated discussions about available supports, opportunities and challenges. Additional study is needed to identify potential strategies that motivate and sustain healthy behaviors among frontline nurses.

**References**


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