Nurse Stories of Meaning and Joy: A Qualitative Study

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Disclosure Statement

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Learner Objectives:
1. Articulate the rationale for studying meaning and joy in nursing.
2. Describe the themes associated with nurse stories of meaning and joy.
3. Discuss the implications for practice, research and education.

I have no financial conflicts of interest to disclose.
The quadruple aim

1. Improving the experience of care
2. Improving the health of populations
3. Reducing per capita costs
4. Improving the experience of providing care

Sikka, Morath, and Leape, 2015
Joy and Meaning in the Work of Healthcare

• *Meaning*: sense of importance of everyday work

• *Joy*: feeling of success and fulfillment that results from meaningful work
Why joy and meaning?

• Allows us to:
  • Perform to our full potential
  • Be our best selves
  • Make our best contributions to achieving the Triple Aim
  • Enhance our well-being
  • **FLOURISH!**
Flourishing goes beyond happiness or satisfaction with life. True, people who flourish are happy. But, that’s not the half of it. Beyond feeling good, they’re also doing good—adding value to the world.

Barbara Fredrickson
How will we know if nurses are flourishing?

Measures:

• Employee Engagement Surveys
• Comprehensive Meaningful Work Scale
• Stories

Research

• Little published
• Qualitative study conducted
What are nurses’ experiences with joy and meaning? A Qualitative Study

• Semi-structured interviews

• Sample:
  • 27 US nurses, 20 female, 7 male
  • Varied roles- clinical, administrative, educational
  • Age range: 31-70
  • Experience: 2-40+ years

• Narrative analysis themes
The experiences of nurses with joy and meaning- Four Themes

• Fulfilling purpose- “I am a nurse”
• Meaningful connection
• Impact- The Wow Factor
• The Practice Environment (3 subthemes):
  • Team Works
  • Leaders Model the Way
  • Opportunities to Learn and Grow
Fulfilling Purpose- “I am a nurse”

Alignment with values, sense of identity and call to serve

“It’s not just what we do, it’s who we are.”

“I was meant to be a nurse.”

“…the joy has been embedded in the congruence between nursing and what I so wanted to be as a person”

“it was always related to caring and helping and really finding meaning through helping”

“I can’t imagine doing anything else.”
Fulfilling Purpose- “I am a nurse”

Drawn to the science and the art

“It took a couple of years to get those competencies to where they were pretty strong,…. now I've got my sea legs. Then that allowed that freedom to start to have those more meaningful interactions.”

“I first went into nursing for the science and I found that after 37 years that it’s not the science that brings me joy, but the intimate experiences. I moved from the science to the caring”
Meaningful Connection

Human connection & relationships with patients and families

“It's about this magical, spiritual connection that you have with another person, this existential feeling that you gain when it's the middle of the night, you're alone, a patient is in distress and you connect with that person. For just a moment, you are that connection, you are the person that comforts them, and there's nothing else in this world that can match that feeling and that's really the heart and soul of nursing.”
Meaningful Connection

Relationships with colleagues or students

“meaning for me in nursing has really been found in not only my patients, but in my …relationships with my colleagues”

“I’ve really gotten a little bit from a whole lot of people and sown them together in this tapestry that I call my nurse life and I’m really trying to give that back to the students. I’m putting my old head on their young shoulders and they respond. That’s pretty meaningful.”
Meaningful Connection

Respecting individuality and human dignity

“...what makes me want to keep coming to work in the morning is those moments I’m able to have with my patient or my family member just finding their humanity... I really appreciate those small moments that I’m able to get to know who my patient is, who the family is that’s supporting them, and that’s what makes it seem all the more worthwhile to me to have that connection with them and maybe impact their life in some way beyond the physical care that I’m providing as a nurse. “
The “little things” make a big difference

“To me that brings me meaning and joy that I'm able to provide those kinds of- I almost said "little things" but they're really big things to someone”

“That was really an amazing experience just to be able to see her face light up when she got outside, when she felt the sun beating on her face. And we didn’t even have to talk when we were down there. She was just so happy to be down there. It was just such a special moment for her and I feel like sometimes in nursing those simple things that don’t even have anything to do with medically fixing someone, it’s the emotional support that you can give to someone, for me and for her.”

“If you stop paying attention to the little things in nursing you miss it because that's what nursing is- it's stringing together all these different things to be able to alleviate suffering”
Impact - The Wow Factor

Making a difference for patients and families

“They come back to visit you and it's like "Wow! I actually had a small part in making this happen."

“But then for her to literally be walking, talking, coming back to say thank you was amazing. So that's the joy.”

“there was a handwritten note handed to me – “Thanks. Now I have a reason to live.”
Impact - The Wow Factor

Making a difference for colleagues

“…for me personally to hear from colleagues I think is really tremendous because they know what you do and that’s where you want to be respected and know that you’re valued and that you bring value to people with what you’re doing.”

“the pride and the joy on that student’s face was definitely a moment of joy for me. So I thought, Wow! There are a lot of people who influenced my life as mentors so that’s the role I’m enjoying playing now with fellow nurses.”

“I think what gives me most joy is knowing that on any given day I’m going to have an opportunity to positively influence the experience of another nurse.”
When you ask about joy and meaning it just brings to mind times when I have had a work environment when it felt supportive and collegial, where I’m learning something and gaining some new insights into what is possible and where there is some kind of support for creative thinking and taking risks"
“the reason why you're so close is because it's so hard… kind of a band of brothers thing that you get…when you really rely on each other, it's a good feeling. It makes what you do more meaningful.”

“…much easier to know that I have a good group of people behind me supporting me, also beside me helping me when things get really tough.”

“a family bond”

“a sense of being part of a community”
Leaders Model the Way

“...role models on the unit. It's having a leader there that really takes on that role and nurses can look up to,... Willing to pass on their knowledge and share their love and joy in what they're doing”

“People’s achievements are so celebrated here, which is so nice...The work you put in is valued. I think that's all any of us ask for is to have our effort valued...”

“I’ve never felt like nursing administration wouldn’t listen to a concern that we brought to them even going straight up to the top if we had to. I’ve always felt like they’re going to listen to us... “
Leaders Model the Way

“I mean we really have made some huge improvements in how nursing is valued in this facility... they’ve come on to seeing the value in education and in certification and how nurses are the people that are there all the time taking care of patients at the bedside and how much we can be involved with policy. Our shared governance committees, they are great here. ICU, we have a Unit Based Council that is particularly active and we have a lot of governance committees for a lot of different things. It’s nice to be so involved in how the hospital works. It’s a good thing.”
Opportunities for Learning and Growth

“…nursing has enriched my life. It’s made me a better problem solver. It’s added to my empathy. It’s really enriched my life and I think my satisfaction comes from my awareness that I’m doing meaningful work.”

“I’ve never felt even as a new nurse that I wasn’t able to ask questions or be open or learn…It’s always been a really great environment to constantly learn something and not be afraid to ask questions or ask for help.

“one of the things that’s unique about nursing is that we can continue to grow and develop and learn and become over the course of our career,…and that there’s no limit on the opportunities or choices we can make in this profession and still be a member… “
What can we do to promote meaning and joy in nursing?
Practice Implications - Preconditions

- Safe environment
- Living our shared core values
- Recognition of the work and accomplishments

Lucian Leape Institute, 2013
Implications for Nurse Leaders

• Healthy practice environments
  • Peers
  • Interprofessional colleagues
  • Leaders

• Autonomy, ability to practice based on the science and art of nursing, be creative

• Time to spend with patients, getting to know them as people

• Support for learning and growth
IHI Framework for Improving Joy in Work
Implications for Research

• Replication globally to describe the universal themes related to meaning and joy in nursing practice
• Internet-based research
• Instrument development
• Exploration of linkages between nurses’ experiences and important healthcare outcomes
Implications for Education

• Incorporation of concepts into nursing curricula
• Skill development for undergraduate students, graduate students and nurse leaders
• Emphasis on self-care to promote well-being
• Continuing education for practicing nurses and leaders
Partial Bibliography


