SCHOLARLY WRITING IN NURSING
A GUIDE FOR STUDENTS

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Scholarly Writing in Nursing: A Guide for Students

Introduction

It is likely becoming clear to you that the Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) program at North Island College requires students to engage in many different types of academic writing. Practicing nurses must be able to clearly articulate complex ideas in writing in order to share nursing knowledge with colleagues and to contribute to a growing body of professional knowledge. In most of your classes, you will be creating practice reflections, class discussion postings, and other informal pieces of writing. However, in your theory classes, a significant part of your course mark may be based on a single scholarly paper.

As you progress through the nursing program, you will find that you are expected to write scholarly papers at increasingly higher levels. For example, you will begin by synthesizing the ideas of others and will gradually move toward developing your own original ideas. Your instructors spend a lot of time and energy providing constructive feedback on your assignments. When students ignore this feedback, their writing often hits a plateau. This means that the same paper that received an “A” in first year may only deserve a “C” in fourth year. The good news is that incorporating instructor feedback into future papers is a guaranteed way to improve your writing (and your marks!). Remember that writing is not a mysterious talent granted to a chosen few—you can become a good writer with the help of your instructors, lots of practice, and a stubborn attitude. This guide is intended to demystify the process of paper writing and provide you with some basic resources for producing scholarly work.
Getting Started

Step 1: Select a Topic

Before you invest too much time developing your ideas, make sure you understand the criteria for the assignment. Read the criteria thoroughly several times. Print out the criteria and keep it beside you as you work. Look up any terminology you find confusing. If you do not meet the criteria for the assignment you may receive a failing grade, so if you are unsure of what is expected, be sure to clarify this with your instructor.

Consider your topic through a nursing lens. Refer to your course reading for an overview of the subject area and then choose a topic that excites you. An academic paper is easier to write (and easier to read!) if the author feels passionately about the topic. Your instructor can help you determine whether your chosen topic is a good fit for the assignment.

Assignment criteria are often deliberately broad. Your challenge is to narrow your topic so that you can address it adequately within the required number of pages. If you are finding an overwhelming number of resources, then your topic is likely too broad. On the other hand, if you are having challenges finding any material on your chosen topic, then you will have to think more broadly.

The 40-20-40 Approach

Some authors (Waye & Doyle, as cited by Walker, 2013) recommend the 40-20-40 rule for writing scholarly work. Spend 40% of your time researching and developing your ideas. Then spend 20% of your time writing the first draft of your paper quickly enough to get your ideas down. Finally, spend the last 40% of your time editing (adding in your references, revising, rearranging, and clarifying ideas). For more information, visit:
http://thenursingscholar.wordpress.com/2013/02/01/the-first-forty/

Step 2: Research the Topic

Before you begin writing, you must have a basic understanding of the ideas nurse scholars have explored related to the topic you have chosen. There are several ways to go about researching your topic.

- The required readings for your course can help you get started. Check the reference lists at the end of textbook chapters and other assigned reading.
- Use nursing literature. Find current, relevant articles written by nurses that are intended to inform nursing practice.
Search the databases (EBSCO, CINAHL Complete, OVID, etc.) of journal articles through the NIC library website. Many articles that are not available in full text through the NIC library can be requested through interlibrary loan and will arrive electronically within a day or two.

Check the library shelves for books related to your topic—the NIC library has a section dedicated to nursing.

Talk to your classmates and to nurses in the clinical setting for their ideas on your topic.

Make friends with the college librarians. Seriously.

You will need to read each of your selected articles a number of times. As you read, highlight important ideas and take notes in the margins. This can be done on a paper copy or electronically using tools on Adobe. Next, summarize these notes in a word document so that you are able to access this information easily as you write your paper. This process allows you to see common themes emerging from the literature and provides you with an informed view of the current state of nursing knowledge in your topic area. Paraphrase the author’s ideas as you take your notes to safeguard against plagiarism (see page 12 for an example of paraphrasing).

**Tips on Finding Relevant Literature**

- **Textbooks:** In general, textbooks are not considered a primary source for scholarly papers. Use textbooks as a way to orient yourself to the topic but do not rely heavily on them to write your paper.

- **Nursing literature:** When your instructor asks you to use current, relevant nursing literature, use recent, peer-reviewed articles from nursing journals. If you are unsure whether a journal can be considered a nursing journal, go to the webpage for that journal and read the description of the journal. Are nurses the intended audience? You can filter your database search so that only peer-reviewed articles are displayed.

- **Other literature:** You may find relevant articles from journals written for other disciplines (for example, medicine, physiotherapy, or social work). These articles can increase your understanding of the topic and improve your paper—use them! Remember, though, that these are not considered nursing literature and will not count toward the required number of nursing articles.

- **Types of articles:** Make sure you know what kind of article you are referencing. Along with research articles, nursing journals contain editorials, book reviews, and other material of interest to nurses. Focus on major articles that share new knowledge such as research studies. Make sure you understand the nature of the study described by the article—this will allow you to support your ideas with evidence from the literature.

- **Currency of articles:** Use articles that are no more than 5-8 years old. Your instructor may set specific limits on the age of articles for your assignment.

- **Minimum number of articles:** In the criteria for your paper, you may be given a minimum number of articles required as references for the assignment. You are not restricted to this number—if you use more articles and explore your topic more thoroughly, your writing will reflect a deeper understanding of the current discourse in that area of nursing practice.
• **Work smarter, not harder:**
  - As you find particularly relevant articles, search for other work by the same author(s). Visit the author’s web page. Search the reference page of the article for other articles that pertain to your topic.
  - Do not be afraid to email the author personally if you were particularly inspired by an article. Most scholars love to hear that their work has had an impact! You can find their contact information on the first page of the article, or by searching online.
  - If you see an article that is referred to repeatedly by other authors, it is worth searching this article out, even if it was published a number of years ago.
  - Some internet sources provide valuable information. Be discriminating in your use of these sources. Ensure they are reliable and unbiased.

**Step 3: Prepare an Outline**

Once you have gathered your research, you will be ready to put together an outline. This part of the writing process can be time consuming, but is an essential step in creating a cohesive paper. Take time to review your research and to think about the common themes that have stood out for you. Consider what has already been said about your topic by others in the nursing field. What new ideas do you have to add to this knowledge base? Be as clear as you can in your own mind about what you want to say in your paper. It may be helpful to use the following process:

- **Come up with a research question.** What question are you trying to answer by writing your paper? Knowing this will help you focus on sources that help answer this question.

- Keeping the assignment criteria in mind, create a draft **thesis statement** that summarizes the most important idea you developed during your research and answers the research question that you have posed (see the box below for more information and the sample introduction on page 4).

- Think about the points you will make that support your thesis statement. Try to arrange these in a logical way for the body of your paper.

- **Use headings** as a way to organize the sections of your paper (see APA 3.03). These can reflect the assignment criteria directly, or may be organized in some other logical way.

- Be prepared to let go of some of your hard-earned ideas! Sometimes, you will want to include interesting ideas or resources that are only remotely related to your topic. Resist the urge! This will keep your paper focused and coherent, and leave you room to meet the assignment criteria within the page limit.
How To Write A Thesis Statement

A thesis statement belongs at the end of your introduction. This prepares your reader for the ideas to come by stating the most important thing that you learned in the writing of your paper. Refer to the assignment criteria for guidance and relate the thesis statement to nursing and to your research question. Often, the writing process will help you develop your ideas and provide you with what you need to write the perfect thesis statement. Have a look at the end of the sample introduction on the next page to see what a well-constructed thesis statement looks like. Here are some possible templates:

In order to provide safe and ethical care to _______, nurses must _______.

When nurses _______, they are able to meet the needs of _______.

Step 4: Write!

A scholarly paper has an introduction, a body, and a summary. Here are some tips for structuring your paper:

Introduction: Tell them what you are going to tell them

An introduction orients the reader to your topic. The University of Manchester identifies the following as elements of an effective introduction:

- Establish the context, background and/or importance of the topic.
- Identify a problem, controversy or a gap in the field of study.
- Define the topic or key terms.
- State the purpose of the paper.
- Provide an overview of the paper - mention each of your main headings:

http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/introductions.htm

The length of the introduction will reflect the total length of the paper, but will usually be at least a two solid paragraphs. Scale your introduction to the length of the paper to ensure that you have enough space to meet the assignment criteria. Refer to the sample following this section for an example of a well-written introduction. If you struggle with the introduction, you can revise it after you write the body of the paper.
Hypertensive Disorders of Pregnancy

Hypertensive disorders of pregnancy (HDP) are one of the leading causes of infant and maternal morbidity and mortality worldwide (Oladapo, XXXX). In Canada, expectant mothers with hypertension are six times more likely than those without to deliver preterm babies, and these babies are at an increased risk for complications (Canadian Institute for Health Information, XXXX). While improved treatment of gestational hypertension (GH) and other HDPs has led to dramatic reductions in maternal mortality and better outcomes for newborns, women who suffer from unexpected, severe complications of pregnancy often experience high levels of stress (Heaman, XXXX). Concern for the emotional and psychological well-being of the woman and her family may be lost as nurses and other care providers address the critical physical needs of both the mother and her fetus.

In this paper, I explore the experience of women with hypertensive disorders of pregnancy from a phenomenological perspective. I examine the emotional impact of these high-risk conditions on women with HDP. Finally, I outline the role of perinatal nurses in alleviating the emotional distress experienced by women with hypertensive disorders of pregnancy. Nurses must address the emotional needs of women with hypertensive disorders of pregnancy to reduce the psychosocial distress these clients experience and ensure that they receive truly holistic care.
The body of the paper is where you develop your ideas about the topic. For this reason, it is also the part of the paper that is worth the most marks (consult the marking rubric for the assignment to see how the marks are weighted). At this point, it may help to summarize your paper out loud to a friend or family member. There must be a logical connection between the ideas, so verbalizing your argument can help you identify weaknesses before you start writing. Are you able to articulate your ideas clearly? Do your ideas fit with the purpose of the assignment? Here are some tips for writing the body of your paper:

- Each paragraph should link logically with the next. Start a new paragraph for each new idea.
- Paragraphs are always more than one sentence in length (APA 3.08).
- Try not to get too worried about style at this point. Get your ideas down on paper and spend time later refining and editing them. Agonizing over word choices at this stage can lead to writer's paralysis.
- Support your statements with evidence from the literature. Always provide citations for any ideas that are not your own, and for any information that is not common knowledge. See comments on academic honesty on page 12.

Summary: Tell them what you told them

A summary is part of every scholarly paper. Here are some important pointers:

- Briefly summarize your key learning. What do you want the reader to take home?
- Do not introduce any new ideas/material.
- Remind the reader of the importance of your ideas.
- Do not end with a quotation.
- Construct a strong concluding sentence...end on a high note!

The summary should reflect your new understanding of the topic and should make a clear connection to the nursing profession.

Some Helpful Tips on Putting the Final Touches on Your Paper:

- Choose a title that reflects the main idea of your paper. Be creative!
- Revisit the criteria and systematically compare it to your paper.
- Allow lots of time for pulling your paper together. Try to have a few days between finishing your paper and the due date so that you can take a fresh look at your writing. In most cases, a few simple changes will result in a superior paper.
- Edit mercilessly to keep your writing concise. The meaning of every sentence should be clear.
- Visit this fantastic resource from the University of Manchester: http://www.phrasebank.manchester.ac.uk/. If you are having difficulty finding the language you need to communicate your ideas in an academic style, this website will help you!
Getting Help with Your Writing

Writing can be lonely work. When you are struggling to pull your ideas together and to create work that reflects your understanding of a topic, there are a number of people who can help:

**NIC Librarians:** Make an appointment well ahead of the due date to sit down with the librarian. She can help you access research in your topic area and has developed many helpful writing resources for students.

**Writing Tutoring:** Writing tutors help with structure, flow, and grammar. Some tutoring is available free of charge to NIC students, but you may also hire a writing tutor if you need substantial help in this area.

**Course Instructor:** Make an appointment with your instructor for clarification of the criteria, to discuss your choice of topic, or to go over a proposed outline.

**Editors:** Editors help with organization, flow, grammar, spelling, and coherence.

**Proofreaders:** Proofreaders check for minor errors in APA formatting, spelling, and grammar.

Remember!! You can have others identify shortcomings in your work but **you must do the writing yourself!!** Seeking help is a good thing - it shows you recognize your writing has room for improvement. However, If you rely too heavily on the help of others, your writing will not improve and this will be clear to your instructors when you are required to write without this support (during an exam, for example).

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**Academic Honesty (Plagiarism)**

Every post-secondary institution has policies addressing academic honesty. You can access North Island College’s Academic Honesty and Standards Policy (#3-26) at:

http://www.nic.bc.ca/PDF_docs/policies/Section3/3-26%20ACADEMIC%20HONESTY%20AND%20STANDARDS.pdf

[Go to NIC Home-About Us-Policies and Procedures-Educational Policies]

Repercussions for students engaging in plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty are extremely serious. You may receive a grade of “0” for the paper and/or for the course, and face suspension from the nursing program. Plagiarism includes “presenting another person’s language, ideas, data, structures or product as original without adequate/accurate acknowledgement that part or all of it was created by someone” (NIC Policy and Procedures Manual, 2009, p. 3). As of this writing, NIC is joining other institutions in using anti-plagiarism software to ensure all students meet the standards outlined in NIC Policy #3-26.
To avoid unintentional plagiarism:

- Be sure to **paraphrase** ideas in your own words, and then cite the source of the idea. Paraphrasing is almost always preferable to direct quotation.

  **Original:** Good note taking, sensible filing of source and notes together, and appreciation of primary and secondary sources of material can help to minimize the risk of plagiarism.

  (Price, 2014)

  **Paraphrase:** Price (2014) claims that students who take effective notes, organize original material and notes in one place, and understand the differences between primary and secondary sources are unlikely to plagiarize.

- When you could not possibly say it better than the author, use a **quotation**. Be sure to use quotation marks whenever you use material word for word, and then cite the source and provide a page number. **Limit yourself to one or two quotations per paper.**

  Russell (2015) advises students to write a quick first draft of their paper to avoid “writer’s paralysis” (p. 7).

- Remember, papers written for other departments may have different requirements for quotations. For example, quotations are not common practice when writing for the sciences.
What is APA and Why Do We Use It?

This writing guide is based on the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA), 6th ed., (2010). All nursing instructors at NIC use the APA manual while grading your papers. The APA manual was developed over 80 years ago as a tool for academics, and is intended to promote clarity and consistency in scholarly writing. As the authors of the manual state, “Manuscript structure, word choice, punctuation, graphics, and references are all chosen to move the idea forward with a minimum of distraction and a maximum of precision” (APA, ¶ 1). While the requirements of APA style may seem overwhelming at first, this guide will provide you with a quick reference guide to the basics. However, this document is not a substitute for the actual APA manual - a close acquaintance with the manual and a familiarity with the many excellent online resources provided here will ensure that you are following the finer points of APA style. Have your APA manual close at hand as you write your paper.

Sample Citations and References for APA 6th Edition

Chapter 7 of the APA Publication Manual, 6th Edition, provides examples of every type of material you might reference in your paper. There are websites that allow you to generate references in APA 6th format by plugging the information into a form (www.citationmachine.net), and then cutting and pasting the resulting reference in to your paper. When you create an account on CINAHL, you can have folders for each assignment and generate citations for each article. Alternatively, you can use the library option on Google Scholar to save all of your citations. Be sure to proofread these carefully!

Citations

Here are a couple of examples of common in-text citations. There is a beautiful chart on page 177 of your APA manual that summarizes the most common citations.

6.11 One Work by One Author

Russell (2015) found that most students were able to improve their scholarly writing over the course of one semester.

Most students improved their scholarly writing over the course of one semester (Russell, 2015).

In 2015, Russell found most students were able to improve their scholarly writing over the course of one semester.
6.12 One Work by Multiple Authors

Meiers, Hartman, and Russell (2015) found...[use as first citation].

Meiers et al. (2015) found...[use as subsequent first citation per paragraph thereafter].

...as shown in recent studies (Meiers, Hartman, & Russell, 2015).

For **two** authors, cite both authors every time the reference appears in the text. For **three to five** authors, cite all authors for the first citation and then the first author only followed by et al. for subsequent citations. For **6 or more** authors, use the first author followed by et al. for first and subsequent citations. See APA Chapter 6 for more information on correct citations.

References

Chapter 7 of the APA manual describes how to format references for your paper. If you have more than a few references, producing a proper APA style reference list can be very time consuming. You can save yourself some time by compiling these in a separate document as you perform your research.

7.01 Articles

Use a DOI when one is available. Otherwise, use the URL for the journal homepage, not the URL for the article. Use this format: *Retrieved from http://www.xxxxxxxxx*

Author(s) (Publication year). Article title: Capitalize after a colon. Journal Title, Volume Number (Issue Number), pp-pp. doi: 10.xxxxxxxxx

**OR, if no DOI:**


**Example:**


7.02 Books

Author, A. A. (20XX). *Title of work*. Location: Publisher.

**Example:**

7.03 Document from an organization: Some common examples for nursing


Citing and Referencing Sources from the Internet:

For online materials, refer to the table at the end of this guide, How to Cite Something You Found on a Website in APA Style (APA, 2010).

Other Helpful APA Resources

The Online Writing Lab (OWL) at Purdue University has many APA resources. They have a great FAQ section that answers many common APA questions:

http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/

The APA Style Blog kicks things up a notch for those of you who love all things APA. If you are really struggling with how to cite or reference a work, it is likely someone has posted a solution here:

http://blog.apastyle.org/

If you think it is unlikely you will ever read the APA manual from cover to cover, Dr. Rose Steele of York University has written a beautiful summary of the manual that sets out the rules in record time. Dr. Steele manages to condense 272 pages in to just 8 pages!

http://www.uvic.ca/hsd/nursing/assets/docs/current/tutor/apa_summary.pdf

Writing Style

Chapter three of the APA 6th manual has a wealth of information on ways to improve your writing style. Here are a few common style mistakes to avoid:

1. Make sure the noun and pronoun in a sentence agree:
   Wrong: The client had their ultrasound this morning. (client is singular, while their is plural).
   Correct: The client had his ultrasound this morning.

2. Avoid contractions. For example, use “do not” instead of “don’t”.

3. Avoid passive language. The example below illustrates how the active form provides more information than the passive by letting the reader know who gave the medication:
   Passive: The medication was given.
   Active: The nurse gave the medication.
4. Remember that most research does not “prove” something. It may indicate, demonstrate, suggest, or show, but proof requires a high level of evidence.

5. Avoid use of “very” and “that”.

6. Say “I believe...” or “I think...” rather than “I feel...”

7. Use apostrophes correctly when indicating the possessive form of a noun:
   - **Wrong**: The clients medication...
   - **Correct**: The client’s medication...
In the next section of this guide, you will find an APA paper written for a second year Health and Healing course at NIC which will give you an idea of how a scholarly paper is laid out in APA style. The criteria for the assignment is provided so that you can see how the author used this to guide the writing process. Remember, the structure of your paper will reflect the specific criteria for the assignment. This paper is intended to give you an example of scholarly writing at the undergraduate level and is not intended to provide a framework for every academic paper you will be assigned.

Note: The ‘XXXX’ in place of the date is used to indicate current literature (no more than five years old). In your paper, use the actual date of publication.

Bibliography


Criteria for Sample APA Paper:
Health and Healing IV Concept Paper Marking Guide (25% of course mark)

The concept paper is a **maximum 6 page** scholarly paper that addresses one of the concepts explored this semester. It utilizes a patient experience with an episodic health challenge that "brings the concept to life". Your paper will be assessed for the following:

- **Organization**: introduction clearly outlines the purpose of the paper and the direction it should take. The body of the paper follows a logical sequence, is clear and concise, and finishes with a summary.

- **Content**: includes relevant and scholarly nursing literature, current references (within the last 5 years), a variety of references (five outside of the assigned reading, from nursing journals), and one credible nursing web site; content should be comprehensive.

- **Critical Thinking**: includes exploration of the relevance of the concept to nursing, comments on the availability/gaps in the literature (what the scholars have to say, what questions you have), exploration of the opportunities/barriers to providing nursing care for your client, and exploration of how the current health care system influences the experiences for clients; be inquisitive and curious, and include integration of your client experience.

- **Format and Style**: Adhere to APA guidelines.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Organization</strong></th>
<th><strong>Content</strong></th>
<th><strong>Critical Thinking</strong></th>
<th><strong>Format &amp; Style</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Relevant and scholarly literature</td>
<td>Explore the relevance of the concept to nursing care</td>
<td>Use of APA: includes spelling, grammar, format, and appropriate referencing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarity of purpose</td>
<td>References current within the last 5 years</td>
<td>Comments on the availability/gaps in the literature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logical sequencing of paper (clear and concise)</td>
<td>Nursing focus</td>
<td>Exploration of opportunities/barriers to providing nursing care</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>Five references outside of the assigned reading</td>
<td>Exploration of how the current health care system influences the experience for clients</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Minimum of 5 nursing journals</td>
<td>Inquisitive and curious</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One credible nursing website</td>
<td>Integration of client experience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Content comprehensive</td>
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<td>Total: /100</td>
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</table>
Advances in surgical technique have resulted in greatly increased survival rates for seriously ill patients. However, short postoperative hospital stays and heavy workloads for nurses contribute to a clinical environment that places an emphasis on physical healing and may fail to address the spiritual and emotional needs of vulnerable clients. Hutchinson (XXXX) describes healing as a relational process resulting in wholeness that may be facilitated by the interventions of caregivers, but ultimately depends on the naturally occurring physical and emotional resources of the client to heal themselves. This paper will explore the emotional and spiritual needs of surgical clients and how nursing practice can incorporate interventions that support holistic healing.

In this paper, I provide a review of current literature on the role of holistic healing and the importance of addressing the emotional needs of clients when planning postoperative nursing care. The comprehensive nature of the research is discussed and areas that require further clarification are identified. The relevance of the concept of holistic healing to nursing practice is explored and the manner in which this concept is manifested in the clinical setting is examined. The postoperative experience of a cancer client, J.S., following a radical retropubic prostatectomy is used to illustrate the importance of caring for the emotional needs of surgical clients. I identify opportunities for delivering care that promote holistic healing, and comment on barriers that may interfere with these interventions. It is the responsibility of nurses to ensure that the emotional needs of surgical clients are met during postoperative care.

Relevance of Holistic Healing to Nursing Care

It is hard to imagine a concept more integral to nursing than that of healing. Healing is defined as not only the absence of disease, but also the attainment of a physical, emotional, spiritual, and social balance (Glaister, XXXX). As nurses are uniquely positioned to assist
clients in their return to health, they are responsible for creating an optimal healing environment and are encouraged to use relational practice to support clients as they heal (McClelland, XXXX). McQueen (XXXX) insists that nurses must care about individuals rather than simply caring for them, and that nurses need to act as “skilled companions” (p. x) in their therapeutic relationships with clients in order to ensure that physical and emotional healing can take place.

**Current Literature on Holistic Healing**

In the past several decades, much scholarly energy has been directed at defining the impact of holistic healing practices on client outcomes, on how holistic healing practices can be incorporated into nursing care, and on the future of holistic care as clients begin to take a more active role in their own care. In a priority index for hospital inpatients, patients ranked the importance of health care workers meeting emotional and spiritual needs as their highest priority (Nussbaum, XXXX). The literature suggests that holistic care promotes the active participation of the client and draws upon the existing resources within the client to address these needs (Glaister, XXXX; Hutchinson, XXXX). McQueen (XXXX) describes the process of holistic healing as a joint venture between caregiver and client, while Maliski, Helleman, and McCorkle (XXXX) stress the importance of client self-care. The impact of emotion on patient healing is clear. Worry and distress decrease as patient control and self-management increase (Hedestig, Sandman, Tomic, & Widmark, XXXX), while physical healing is compromised by fear and powerlessness (Nussbaum, XXXX).

Healing is facilitated by the development of open and caring relationships between client and nurses. Glaister (XXXX) states that empathetic, respectful, genuine, and compassionate interactions between clients and caregivers promote healing. McQueen (XXXX) and Hutchinson (XXXX) stress the importance of open communication and
empathetic listening, while Perez (XXXX) states that communion, simply being present with a client in need, allows holistic healing to take place.

The literature stresses the importance of post-discharge support for clients. With short hospital stays the standard, much of the burden of healing in the weeks and months following surgery is borne by patients and their families (Hartford, XXXX). Studies employing follow-up visits and telephone calls by specialized nurses correlate these interventions with improved physical and emotional healing (Burt, Celli, Moore, & Anderson, XXXX; Hartford, XXXX; Maliski et al, XXXX). Hedestig et al. (XXXX) are emphatic that surgical patients be offered adequate information and support upon their return home, as these interventions offer emotional support, provide information, and dispel misinformation.

Despite the abundance of literature on healing and healing theory, it is not clear how this research brings about change in the practice setting. Although nurses are responsible for interpreting and using current research to make practice decisions (College of Registered Nurses of British Columbia, XXXX), scholars must inspire nurses to revise their practice to incorporate recommended interventions and must convince health care administrators of the importance of supporting holistic care. It is critical that future research address strategies for implementing holistic interventions at every level in the health care structure.

The Experience of J.S.: Opportunities and Obstacles to Healing

During two shifts on a surgical unit, I was assigned care of J.S., a single fifty seven year old male recovering from a radical retropubic prostatectomy following prostate cancer. While in hospital, J.S. benefited from the moral support and physical care provided by nurses, physicians, and other care staff. While I felt confident that J.S. would have access to excellent physical care from home care nurses after discharge, I was concerned that the lack
of emotional support he would receive on his return home would be a major obstacle to his emotional and spiritual healing.

J.S. had a history of depression and was on antidepressant medication. As well, he had undergone major surgery for skin cancer six months previously. He would be returning to his third floor apartment in a small community one and a half hours away from the hospital and from his urologist. He had no living relatives, and only a small circle of male friends. Although his surgery was declared a success and complete physical recovery was expected, J.S. seemed anxious and preoccupied during his postoperative stay in hospital.

I asked J.S. to explain to me his understanding of his health challenge and found that he did not seem well-informed about the possible adverse effects of his surgery, nor about what to expect during his recovery. Because anxiety and stress associated with surgery and hospitalization can interfere with a client’s ability to retain information (Hartford, XXXX), it is important that client education and support continue in the weeks and months following surgery. As J.S. was at risk of experiencing isolation at home, I felt a lack of nursing support and patient teaching were the biggest obstacles to healing he would face after discharge.

As the most frequent cancer among men, prostate cancer results in challenges to men’s self-image and sexual identity. Despite physical healing, one year after prostatectomy over eighty percent of men experience complete impotence and up to fifty percent suffer from urinary incontinence. Given these numbers, it is easy to see why patient teaching and psychological support make up sixty five percent of post prostatectomy nursing interventions (Maliski et al., XXXX). While nursing support for the physical aspects of J.S.’s healing are in place in his community, he risks being frustrated and overwhelmed by the emotional demands of his recovery in the absence of adequate follow up support. Pilot studies exploring telephone nursing for post-prostatectomy patients suggests this intervention promotes client
control by providing information, encouraging self-care and offering emotional support (Burt et al., XXXX; Maliski et al., XXXX). Unfortunately for J.S., such services are not yet part of routine postoperative care for this group of clients.

The study performed by Burt et al. (XXXX) stressed that men may face additional obstacles to emotional healing because of social expectations associated with the masculine role which then may be reinforced during interactions with male urologists. Because what male patients say can vary significantly from what they feel, the authors suggest nurses consider initiating conversations that address men’s sexuality and be sensitive to nonverbal cues that could indicate their emotional distress over issues of sexuality. While Burt et al. suggest that prostate cancer support groups can offer social support, J.S. may not have the benefit of adequate nursing resources to address his psychological needs as he comes to terms with his altered sexuality.

**Holistic Healing within the Constraints of the Healthcare System**

Increasingly brief hospital stays restrict the ability of nurses and other care givers to establish relationships with patients that facilitate the emotional aspect of healing. Clients such as J.S. would benefit greatly from supportive interventions that address their spiritual needs once they leave the hospital, such as telenursing and home visits by urology nurses. These interventions have proven more effective than non-interactive discharge materials (Hartford, XXXX).

While in hospital, clients benefit from health care providers who are able to listen empathetically, who encourage them to come to terms with reality, and who are able to join them on their healing journey (Nussbaum, XXXX). O’Baugh, Wilkes, Luke, and George (XXXX) report that, while nurses often insist that clients remain positive to promote healing, this attitude often places additional burdens on the patient. Instead, nurses must take a
HEALING OF MIND

phenomenological approach in order to accurately assess individual client needs and facilitate emotional healing. It is within the scope of nursing practice to enter into a "joint venture" (McQueen, XXXX, p. X) with the client, encouraging their participation and enhancing their control, and thereby contributing to the healing of mind and body.

Summary

The importance of the spiritual aspect of client care cannot be overemphasized. Nussbaum (XXXX) quotes from the book, Anatomy of an Illness, as Perceived by the Patient, written by Norman Cousins after his own acute illness:

And there was the utter void created by the longing - ineradicable, unremitting, pervasive - for warmth of human contact. A warm smile and an outstretched hand were valued even above the offerings of modern science, but the latter were far more accessible than the former. (p. xx)

Nurses are in an ideal position to facilitate the emotional healing of surgical clients. To ensure that current systemic inadequacies are addressed, nurses must promote value of post discharge interventions such as telephone support and home visits to decision makers at all levels of the health care system. It is a nursing role to advocate for these vulnerable clients by raising awareness of these methods in their practice settings. For clients such as J.S., the caring actions of a compassionate nurse can help bring about the healing of both body and spirit.

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References


Hutchinson, T. (XXXX). Transitions in the lives of patients with End Stage Renal Disease: A cause of suffering and an opportunity for healing. *Palliative Medicine, 19*(4), 270-77. doi: 10.123456789


McQueen, A. (XXXX). Nurse-patient relationships and partnership in hospital care.


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## Appendix

### How to Cite Something You Found on the Internet: *What to Do When Information Is Missing*

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Everything is hard before it is easy.

- Goethe