The Mindful Nurse Practices Self-Care

To be able to care for others, nurses need to take care of themselves. One way they can do this is through practicing mindfulness, a powerful approach to self-care. If you’re unfamiliar with this term, the ANA (2016) explains it like this: “Mindfulness means to purposefully pay attention in the present moment with a sense of acceptance and nonjudgment” (para. 1). Howland & Bauer-Wu (2015) suggest it involves engaging all five of your senses in what is going on in each moment, free from the distractions occurring around you, and they say, “mindfulness is a way of living with greater attention and intention and less reactivity and judgment” (para. 13).

If nurses don’t take the time to practice mindfulness, they can suffer from emotional distress, psychological and physiologic stress, and burnout. Mindfulness training can help reduce these while increasing empathy, job satisfaction, and a sense of well-being (Howland & Bauer-Wu, 2015). There are other ways that mindfulness can help nurses: “Greater awareness and less distraction in the clinical setting can improve your assessment skills (for instance, allowing you to identify subtle changes in a patient’s condition) and your performance of complex technical procedures that may reduce the risk of clinical errors. … Listening and speaking with greater attention can lead to more effective communication and better clinical outcomes, particularly in crisis situations” (Howland & Bauer-Wu, 2015, para. 10).

Now that we know what mindfulness is and why it’s needed, the question is, how do we accomplish it? The ANA (2016) suggests the following self-care steps:

1. Set aside some quality time for yourself—really engage in something you enjoy, and focus on just what you’re doing at that time.
2. Reflect on your intentions for the day—spend some time deciding what you want to accomplish and how you can get there.
3. Focus on your talents—develop the talents you have or take some time to figure out what they are.
4. Choose to bring positive energy to work and don’t take things personally.
5. Set a health goal and determine what you can do to meet the goal.
6. Strengthen your resilience; maintain well-being and work performance under pressure.
7. Work toward a work-life balance; learn how to say “no” and resist the urge to plug in to technology.
8. Focus on being present and really listening to patients and colleagues. Try to avoid multitasking.
9. Set up quality time with family and friends.
10. Accept and achieve work-life balance—accept that your new normal is a life that balances home life and work.

Mindfulness-based practices include complementary treatment methods like meditation, breathing, and visualization techniques which can help; mindful movement like walking, yoga, and tai chi can help as well (Ponte & Koppel, 2015). Doing something as simple as breathing while noticing the sensations of the air as it travels in and out of your body, or focusing on your feet as they rest on the floor and really feeling them do it are some ways to settle a distracted mind and allow you to relax (Howland & Bauer-Wu, 2015).

You can learn and develop mindfulness through regular mindfulness practices. The resulting ability to notice attentively and see situations more clearly can help you respond thoughtfully rather than react. This is especially important for nurses in terms of self-care and optimal care of patients (Howland & Bauer-Wu, 2015). Helping yourself by using these techniques can reduce stress and minimize burnout while enhancing the care and well being of your patients.

References