

Talking with the Expert: An interview with Holly Carpenter, from Healthy Nurse, Healthy Nation initiative

Editor in Chief Dr. Jihane Frangieh and Holly Carpenter, BSN, RN

JF. Could you share a bit about your role as a senior health policy advisor and your involvement with Healthy Nurse, Healthy Nation®?

HC: Sure, I have been with ANA since 2007. As a senior policy advisor, I do fulfill many roles and responsibilities. It has been my pleasure to be a part of the Healthy Nurse, Healthy Nation team since its debut in 2017. As part of this team, I develop content and promotion materials, edit and review proposed resources, help develop health policy, co-lead the HNHN Advisory Committee, produce a monthly HNHN partner newsletter, plan special wellness events, and man conference booths. As my portfolio at ANA includes both HNHN and ANA's Nursing Programs & Work Environment department, I often "marry" the content between the two. For example, I may create continuing education programs, give presentations, or write an article or blog on how climate change affects our mental and physical health or how COVID-19 impacted immunization rates.

JF. What are the primary goals of the Healthy Nurse, Healthy Nation initiative, and how do they align with promoting nurse well-being in Maryland?

HC: HNHN aims to improve the health of the nation, one nurse at a time. Specifically, we focus on six specific wellness domains: physical activity, nutrition, rest, mental health, safety, and quality of life. The Maryland Nurses Association was an early adopter of HNHN, becoming a Champion partner of HNHN in 2017. HNHN has presented at past Maryland Nurses Association's conferences and shares resources and opportunities with MNA as they become available. Several Maryland nurses have been featured in our #healthynurse Spotlights which focus on various nurses' wellness journeys and stories.

JF. From your experience, what are some of

the key challenges nurses in Maryland face when it comes to their mental, emotional, and physical well-being, and what impact have you observed so far from the HNHN program?

HC: As a Maryland nurse myself, for my physical health, I know I struggle with a sedentary lifestyle, portion control, and eating too few fruits and vegetables and too much processed food. Occupational health issues that HNHN has noted for US nurses include suboptimal staffing, excessive work load, workplace violence/incivility/bullying, fatigue, workplace stress, heavy lifting, prolonged standing. This was noted in our five-year analysis of our HealthyNurse® Survey data published in the October 2022 issue of American Nurse Journal.

JF. Can you tell us about any specific policies or programs in Maryland aimed at supporting the well-being of nurses?

HC: Nationally, in addition to HNHN, the American Nurses Foundation's Nurse Well-Being: Building Peer and Leadership Support program offers a free training curriculum based on the Stress First Aid model to address burnout and improve recovery from stress reactions, both in oneself and in coworkers. Specifically in Maryland, nurses may want to check out R3-The Renewal, Resilience and Retention of Maryland nurses Initiative from the Johns Hopkins School of Nursing at <https://nursing.jhu.edu/faculty-research/research/centers/r3/>. R3 offers resources for nurses to increase and strengthen their innate resiliency, particularly focusing on burnout prevention.

JF. What tools, strategies, or resources would you recommend for nurses to better manage stress and maintain well-being?

HC: We're nurses and we know what to do but finding the time and energy is often the difficult part. We must begin to put ourselves first so that we can be our best selves to help others. Here are some tips that come up again

and again in HNHN and with our #healthynurse Spotlights:

- Self-care and resilience-building are two of the most important building blocks, but they have come under scrutiny as they often put the entire burden of nurse mental well-being on the nurses themselves.
- Explore what wellness and well-being resources your employer offers. Employee wellness programs, gym memberships and discounts, employee assistance programs, occupational health services, and health insurance-sponsored resources may be available. Your spouse or partner may also have wellness benefits you can access.
- Assess your mental health before it becomes an issue and seek help immediately when needed. We as nurses must help erase the stigma attached to mental health.
- Keep up with all your preventive healthcare including immunizations, annual physicals, vision checks, et cetera.
- Work with your employer to ensure that you can take your breaks and your vacation time.
- Eat more plant-based foods. Watch your portion size.
- Move more and try to get more time outdoors.
- Strive for 7-9 hours of restorative sleep in a 24-hour period.
- Practice gratitude.
- Engage in activities with people that bring you joy.
- Ask for help at home and work when you need it.
- Try meditation, yoga, Tai Chi, or other calming holistic practices.
- Support and allow yourself to be supported by colleagues and co-workers. Consider finding a mentor or mentoring a new nurse.
- Join or become more involved with a faith

community or a civic organization.

JF. Are there any platforms or apps related to HNH that you find particularly helpful for promoting well-being among nurses?

HC: We have an active private Facebook group "Healthy Nurse, Healthy Nation". Please consider joining this fun, active, and moderated group where recipes, resources, exercise regimens, CE resources, daily challenge tips and more are shared by members. We are also on X (formerly Twitter) at @HealthyNurseUSA and Instagram at healthynurseusa. Tag us with #healthynurse.

JF. How can nurses and healthcare organizations get involved with the Healthy Nurse, Healthy Nation initiative to actively support their well-being?

HC: Both nurses and their employers can join HNH. Nurses can join at the individual level at www.hnhn.org. It is free of charge, you do not need to be an ANA member to join, AND all are welcome including undergrad nursing students. I recommend making a

health commitment on our commitment wall, taking the HealthyNurse Survey, and joining our monthly challenges. At your leisure, you can peruse our blogs, #healthynurse Spotlights, and take part in our discussion boards. Organizations can join HNH too! Go to www.hnhn.org, find the Partners tab at the top of the screen, then fill out the drop down application. Again, it is free. Partners, if they can and do join at the Champion or Collaborator level (all levels are available at no cost) are eligible to be added to our HealthyNurse Survey—that way once 25 or more participants that identify with that partner take the survey, the partner can receive de-identified aggregated health, safety, and wellness data from the survey to identify where their nurses best need wellness support. ■



View
References
Online

Holly Carpenter, BSN, RN is a Senior Policy Advisor for the American Nurses Association's (ANA) Nursing Practice & Work Environment department and ANA's Healthy Nurse, Healthy Nation program. Her portfolio at ANA includes developing resources, policies, and education programs on nurse health, safety, and wellness including nurse suicide prevention, mental health, immunizations, climate change, and other occupational health and environmental health issues. She currently co-chairs the Nurses Obesity Network and serves on the technical expert panel for the AHRQ Surveys on Patient Safety Culture™. Holly has concentrated on nurse occupational health, as well as nurse wellness since her hire at ANA in 2007. She has had multiple articles published on a variety of nurse health, safety, and wellness topics and has presented nationally and internationally on nurse wellness.



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