

EDITORIAL

Prioritizing Wellness: The Power of Self-Care, Connection, and Belonging in Nursing

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In the demanding field of nursing, our commitment to caring for others often leaves little room to care for ourselves. However, when we neglect our own well-being, it not only impacts our personal health but also compromises the quality and safety of patient care. Prioritizing self-care is essential for our own resilience, and to ensure we continue providing the highest standard of care to those who depend on us.

Nurses operate in complex and high-pressure environments. These settings expose us to various challenges ranging from the risk of infection and physical or verbal assault to managing multiple patients with complex needs. We often face the physical demands of long shifts, have emotionally intense conversations with patients and families, and navigate difficult social and ethical dilemmas. Alongside these challenges, many nurses experience a quieter, more personal struggle: loneliness¹.

Whether working on the front lines of clinical care or in academic settings, many nurses experience feelings of isolation. Loneliness has become a significant and growing concern within our profession¹, underscoring the need for stronger support systems to promote connection and well-being. In 2023, the U.S. Surgeon General declared loneliness a national epidemic, urging organizations in healthcare and education to restructure systems that reduce loneliness and foster meaningful relationships². In response to this call, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN)³ encouraged nursing schools to prioritize “belongingness” as a means to strengthen social connections and improve the overall experiences of faculty and students.

Research shows that a lack of social support is linked to burnout among nurses⁴, while building connections with peers fosters recognition and appreciation⁵. Strengthening social connectedness within the nursing profession is essential to supporting well-being and long-term resilience. Supportive work environments that foster interpersonal and structural relationships, along with informal social support from family and friends, play a crucial role in enhancing leadership capacity, guiding decisions, and improving job satisfaction and retention⁶.

While self-care is crucial, it must be supported by workplace policies that promote well-being and create environments where nurses can thrive. Improving the well-being of nurses is not an individual responsibility; it requires systemic change. Healthcare leaders must take intentional steps to rebuild trust and strengthen relationships with nurses. At the same time, nurses must advocate for their own well-being and prioritize self-care.

Self-care isn't selfish, it's a key tool for preventing burnout, improving relationships, and increasing effectiveness. I encourage you all to incorporate self-care into your daily routine, even during work hours. Take breaks, eat nourishing food, listen to music, or meditate when possible. If your schedule is already full, practice saying “no” to extra responsibilities when necessary.

Make self-care an intentional part of your routine, just like scheduling work commitments. Take time to reflect on how you handle life's demands and learn to recognize when you need to slow down and recharge. Ask yourself: What

daily practices support my well-being? Are there areas where I can enhance my self-care? Engaging in hobbies or activities that bring you joy is essential for renewal, allowing you to show up fully in both your personal and professional life.

Incorporating small but meaningful practices like taking deep breaths, going for a walk, or expressing gratitude can have a powerful impact. Gratitude helps us recognize the good in our lives. By acknowledging these moments, we foster appreciation for the support we receive and strengthen our connections with those around us.

Caring for yourself isn't just a personal necessity, it's essential for sustaining the care you provide to others. By prioritizing balance, fostering meaningful connections, and practicing gratitude, we cultivate the resilience essential to thriving both personally and professionally. Together, we can rise to the challenges of our profession with renewed strength, empathy, and well-being, ensuring we continue to make a meaningful impact in the lives of those we serve. ■



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