



## Wellpower: The Foundation of Innovation

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- ▶ The financial and human costs of compassion fatigue and burnout can be devastating.
- ▶ In the haste to “get more done,” are we hardwiring our caregivers for disaster?
- ▶ The lifestyle choices we make and the degree of self-care we practice are paramount to not only our individual quality and quantity of life and our immediate circle of influence but holds the profound potential to create quantum change within our health care system.
- ▶ For nurses, who are the most influential force for health care reform in America, the time to emulate wellness has never been more critical.
- ▶ By creating healthy habits for ourselves, we flourish as ambassadors of self-care for our patients, families, colleagues, and communities.
- ▶ As we move forward with health care reform, the most powerful influence that we, as nurse leaders can wield is to practice regular self-care, healthy lifestyles, and preventative medicine.

patients experiencing varying aspects of pain (physical, emotional, social). Compassion fatigue is associated with the “cost of caring” and refers to the resultant strain and weariness that evolves over time (Showalter, 2010; Thomas & Wilson, 2004). Implicit in its nature is a preoccupation with the trauma experienced by patients (Figley, 2002). Compassion fatigue characterizes a progressive state of emotional unease. It evolves from compassion discomfort, to compassion stress, and finally to compassion fatigue, a state where the compassion energy that is expended by nurses (and others) surpasses their ability to recover from this energy expenditure, resulting in significant negative psychological and physical consequences. This toxic cocktail impacts patient satisfaction scores, chronic absenteeism, spiraling worker’s comp costs, high turnover rates, poor teamwork, errors and falls, to name a few.

Internationally recognized caring expert and researcher Joan Borysenko, PhD, in a keynote presentation given at the 2012 Integrative Healthcare Symposium, said “One of the most widespread problems in health care today is the psychological and spiritual alienation created by burnout and compassion fatigue. In the Healing Arts, the relationship itself is the medicine, a transcendent field that embraces both the clinician and the person being served. In the process both reclaim the vital soul quality of wholeness and a greater awareness of being. As a result, symptoms are reduced and patients become more skillful, and empowered as do the clinicians themselves. Understanding the inner and outer landscape of burnout is a vital step toward nourishing the aliveness and presence that are at the heart of healing” (Borysenko, 2012).

Borysenko contends that tending to ourselves is healing to others. She defines *healing presence* as the inner experience you create for yourself that allows a safe place for others. “Inner experience changes your physiology and brings forth the potential in others, allowing you to guide and assume a catalytic relationship with those around you” (Borysenko, 2012).

### Care for Self

*“If your compassion does not include for yourself, it is incomplete.”*

– Jack Kornfield, best-selling author and Buddhist teacher

As important as keeping up with the latest evidence in treatments and pharmaceuticals, our professional responsibility must include care for self.



Kim Richards

*“That no man can sincerely try to help another without helping himself...it is one of the most beautiful compensations in life...”*

– Ralph Waldo Emerson

**A**T A TIME WHEN THE environment in health care is turbulent at best, hospitals are searching for ways to cut costs yet maintain quality care with less resources. As bud-

gets are crunched and employees are multitasking like never before, adrenal overload has become the new norm. Scattered and splattered attention and a drive-by focus means we leave a little bit of it here, there, and everywhere.

In the haste to “get more done,” are we hardwiring our caregivers for disaster? The financial and human costs of compassion fatigue and burnout can be devastating. Sabo (2006) described compassion fatigue as a severe malaise resulting from caring for

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Distinguished nursing theorists such as Barbara Dossey, PhD, RN, AHN-BC, FAAN, and Jean Watson, PhD, RN, AHN-BC, FAAN, have devoted their highly respected careers to developing the foundation of healing presence by first treating self with loving kindness and essential self-care. The Theory of Integral Nursing (Dossey & Keegan, 2013) is considered a grand theory that presents the science and art of nursing. If we don't allow time for caregivers to process their own feelings or pay attention to their own needs, they end up giving more and more and caring for self less and less. To ignore this essential element of healing, caring, and compassion is fruitless when attempting to create the optimal healing environment for those who have entrusted their lives to us.

Dossey identified six pathways of self-care – physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, relationships, and choice – which offer an effective framework for self-care practice. The natural interweaving of each path serves to boost the other paths.

### Lifestyle Intervention

*“Self-care is never a selfish act. It is simply good stewardship of the only gift that I have.”*

– Parker Palmer

Consider the following sobering statistics:

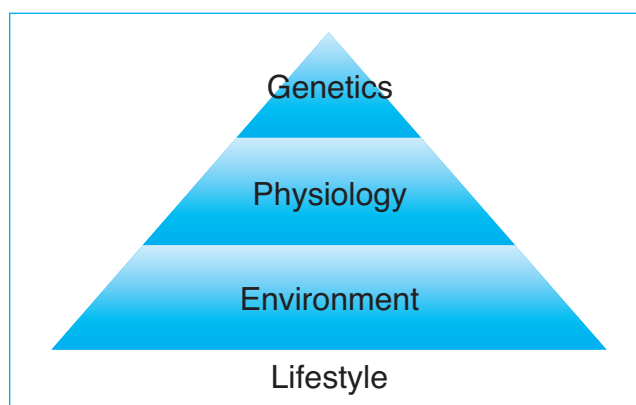
- Chronic diseases are responsible for 84% of all health care costs.
- In 2009, 145 million people – almost half the U.S. population – had a chronic condition.
- Approximately 67% of the workforce is overweight or obese and, in recent years, there has been a 36% hike in health care spending associated with obesity (Archer, 2012, p. 41; Lewis, 2010).

Jeffery Bland, PhD, FACN, FACB, a recognized leader in the nutritional medicine field for over 25 years, stated at the 2012 Integrative Healthcare Symposium that at *least* 70% of all diseases are preventable or modifiable through lifestyle intervention (Bland, 2012). Our habits and stressors can control our “book of life.” What’s pushing on the chapters in your book?

Dr. Bland points out that one can't change his or her genes (genetics), but *can* change the environment that allows wellness or disease to flourish (epigenetics). As an example, food is information for our genes; food speaks to our genes. The food you eat can be the safest and most powerful form of medicine or the slowest form of poison (see Figure 1).

More than half of Americans will have diabetes or prediabetes by 2020 (UnitedHealth Center for Health Reform & Modernization, 2010). Currently, 75% of the \$2.7 trillion in health care costs are due to chronic illness. Aggressive, interventional lifestyle changes are imperative and urgent. As health care leaders, our

**Figure 1.**  
**Lifestyle**



greatest leverage to influence change in the future is to emulate healthy habits and practice self-care. Maladaptive behaviors make the world really, really small and diminish our message of, “Listen to us nurses!” and essentially allow continuation of a failed medical model. What is personal becomes universal.

Dean Ornish, MD, founder and president of the non-profit Preventative Medicine Research Institute in Sausalito, CA, and clinical professor of medicine at the University of California, San Francisco, believes in lifestyle as treatment, not simply prevention. The food we eat, our ability to regulate stress, daily exercise, and a life full of love and support play a critical role in profound healing at the cellular level as well as “securing the vault” against rogue disease triggers.

Over 200 chronic diseases, such as “diabesity,” defined by functional medicine expert, Mark Hyman, MD, as a lifestyle-driven chronic disease including heart disease, diabetes, and obesity, have a root cause of inflammation. Dr. Hyman estimates the epidemic of “diabesity” will cost the global economy \$47 trillion over the next 20 years (Hyman, 2011).

It is the constant barrage of assaults, both internal and external, on our immune system that can trigger the inflammatory response, thus metaphorically flipping the switch of “alarm.” Assaults such as chronic stress, adrenal overload, insomnia or sleeplessness, infection, intense grief, depression, poor nutrition and hydration, immobility, and injury are but a few examples of triggers that can set the inflammatory cycle into a full-blown cyclone of destruction.

The lifestyle choices we make and the degree of self-care we practice are paramount to not only our individual quality and quantity of life and our immediate circle of influence but holds the profound potential to create quantum change within our health care system. The self-created “environment” in which we either thrive or barely survive serves as the foundation for longevity.

## Happiness and Well-Being

Cardiologist and author Mimi Guarneri, MD, FACC, illustrates the importance of environment. Is your environment regularly replenished with happiness, purpose, gratitude, forgiveness, enthusiasm, nurturing relationships, and laughter? Consider this: You are a health care expert, but are you also a happiness expert?

Some health advocates are calling for positive well-being to be incorporated into health care and public policy worldwide. In a 2011 review of more than 160 pertinent studies, researchers Ed Diener and Micaela Chan concluded interventions to improve subjective well-being should be added to the list of public health measures and policymakers should be alerted to the relevance of subjective well-being for health and longevity. Their review, which is the most comprehensive of its kind, also points to the conclusion that health and in turn longevity are determined by our mood states. The researchers suggest high subjective well-being may add 4-10 years of life compared with low subjective well-being (and the years will have been more enjoyable than they would have been for less happy people!).

Diener and Chan (2011) believe moods and emotions are consistently associated with biological measures such as blood pressure, cortisol, and inflammation, as well as artery thickening, stronger immune function, fewer colds and flu, and reduces the odds of contracting disease or dying young. They suggest that along with avoiding obesity, good nutrition, not smoking, and exercise, adding positive well-being to the list is an obvious indicator of health and wellness.

Finding meaning, developing supportive relationships, taking quiet time to decompress, focusing on areas that bring joy and purpose to our lives, and getting a daily dose of this expanded type of “medicine” are vital to improving resilience, a trait that is mandatory for caregivers and nurse leaders.

Resilient people know how to soothe themselves, have a special “way of thinking” about their lives, know how to restore balance in the midst of chaos, can reassure themselves, and restore a sense of self, faith, and ability to cope. They take charge of their thoughts and emotions they cultivate in their hearts.

Allowing yourself to feel good and have positive emotions can propel you to get into a flow – a state of absorption and invigoration. Flow is incredibly beneficial and long lasting in re-energizing and refreshing a weary soul. You can’t access good feelings if you constantly devalue and neglect good feelings. Happy people understand they must have a dose everyday.

## Strategies for Sustainable Happiness

The following 12 researched strategies for sustainable happiness are adapted with permission from *The How of Happiness: A Scientific Approach to*

*Getting the Life You Want* by Sonja Lyubomirsky (2007).

1. *Count your blessings.* Express gratitude for what you have, through contemplation, journaling, or verbally sharing your appreciation for others.
2. *Cultivate optimism.* Keep a journal and write about the best possible future for yourself.
3. *Avoid overthinking and social comparison.* Minimize dwelling on problems and comparing yourself to others.
4. *Practice acts of kindness* for friends or strangers, directly or anonymously, spontaneously or planned.
5. *Develop nurturing relationships.* Choose a relationship in need of strengthening and invest time and energy in healing, affirming, and enjoying it.
6. *Do more activities that truly engage you.* Increase the number of experiences at home and at work in which you “lose” yourself.
7. *Replay and savor* life’s joys through thinking about them, writing, drawing, or sharing them with others.
8. *Commit to your goals.* Select several significant, meaningful goals and devote time and effort to pursuing them.
9. *Develop strategies* for coping with stress, hardship, or trauma.
10. *Learn to forgive.* Keep a journal or write a letter to let go of anger and resentment.
11. *Practice religion and/or spirituality.*
12. *Take care of your body* by engaging in physical activity, meditating, and smiling and laughing.

There are many opportunities to add self-care strategies to your life. Try thinking of your day in segments: as you awaken, getting ready to travel to work, transporting yourself to work, walking in your office, greeting your colleagues, lunchtime...fast forward to bedtime...you get the picture.

Now, think of some of your favorite activities, people, places, events, daily affirmations, music, hobbies, and other “tools” you can access to infuse moments of self-care into your daily routine. Where could you squeeze in a favorite? At lunch, before a meeting or as you travel home? Would it be possible to take a different route, stop for a few minutes in a park, drive down a scenic road, listen to your favorite music, or silence your phone? How about de-cluttering your office or your bedroom? How would it feel to walk into an organized, peaceful room each morning and each evening? Ahhhh...

## Being Mindful

As you mentally walk through your day, be mindful of the minutes spent on insignificant or unimportant tasks and times where you may not even take a deep breath before jumping into the next “thing” on

your to-do list. When you start to break down your day into segments, you will find that you indeed do have small breaks that are begging to be filled with self-care and resiliency improving practices. I challenge you to start with one practice, do it consistently for 30 days, and it will become habit. Then, move to another. The more you practice mindfulness and focus on one new habit, the more it tends to hardwire your brain for change. Numerous studies have documented that the practice of mindfulness can cause positive changes in the brain activity, essentially “lighting up” areas that were once dormant.

One of my favorite, easy habits is making a high antioxidant shake every day using blueberries, flax, vitamin D, and essential fatty acids and other supplements such as turmeric for its anti-inflammatory effect. I buy capsules and break them apart because I have a strong aversion to taking pills! Even though this is a small act, it serves to ground me for the day and set my self-care intention in motion. I also take the first minute I wake up to offer thanks and gratitude to my higher power for allowing me the honor and grace to serve others. The power of gratitude cannot be underestimated.

These two quick practices serve to feed my mind, body, and spirit and take less than 5 minutes of my day. I share this as an example of how self-care need not take up large chunks of time, but can be moments strung together throughout your day. I also schedule larger amounts of time to spend on things I love, such as biking, hiking, Zumba, teaching yoga, and walking my dogs. These activities feed my soul and I find I am better able to focus and be more productive and efficient when I carve time out of my day by actually scheduling such activities. To me, they are relaxing, rejuvenating, and are important in fueling my life purpose. I feel happy, calm, and more balanced when I apply those self-nurturing, lifestyle interventions and see them as “medicine” for a healthy life.

A self-care practice that I have struggled with over the years is vulnerability and asking for help before I need it. I hear this challenge echoed by caregivers and nurse leaders around the country, even internationally. I have learned, sometimes the hard way, that overcommitting myself and not saying, “No, I can’t” has become easier with practice...and with age! I was breaking down before I slowed down. My rehab started with being keenly aware of my response before I spoke, mindful of the self-induced stress of taking on too much, and if I felt uneasy, choosing to take a neutral position while processing the request.

I now freely admit I am not Superwoman, don’t aspire to be, and feel more freedom to truly focus on what’s important to me. I understand working hard doesn’t mean working all the time and that overwork is a self-inflicted punishment. My efficiency soars as my intensity of focus improves.

## A Message for Nurse Leaders

As nurse leaders, we would be neglectful not to teach and emulate this critical self-care practice for staff, particularly new graduates and new managers. Conveying the importance of routine self-care, supporting their care plan, and watching for signs of strain is a legacy that we, as seasoned nurses, must be responsible for leaving with those who follow. Knowing what tools to access and to push the reset button during stressful times is mandatory learning and practice breeds resilience. Improving one’s personal landscape leads to flourishing.

As we move forward with health care reform, the most powerful influence that we, as nurse leaders, can wield is to practice regular self-care, healthy lifestyles, and preventative medicine. The art of learning self-care through multiple pathways that integrate the mind, body, and spirit is a lifelong journey, yet one that must become routine, and embody the same discipline as something as regular as brushing your teeth. (Another moment to practice kind and encouraging self-talk!)

The University of Minnesota Center for Spirituality & Healing (2012) defines well-being as a state of being in balance or alignment (body, mind, spirit). It is also described as being content, connected to purpose, peaceful, energized, in harmony, happy, prosperous, and safe. They outline the following elements of well-being leaders:

- Understand the value of your own well-being, the well-being of others, and the impact this has on the organization.
- Develop and maintain well-being practices and leadership skills in the face of complexity and challenge.
- Recognize and work with patterns at a whole person and whole systems level.
- Evoke innovative thinking and allow answers to emerge from diverse perspectives.
- Take adaptive action that transforms individuals, teams, organization, and the larger community and leads to sustainable practices and results.
- Energize positive change by making well-being contagious!

I have been honored to bear witness to numerous private awakenings as an integrative nurse health coach. As a groove in the brain opens to a new way of living and caring for self, many have discovered the essence of who they are, new meaning and purpose for their lives, and expansion of boundaries that had limited not only their livelihood but their entire existence as well. The magical moment when the dots are connected, starting with self, is an addicting reward. Possibilities and strategies for improved happiness, reduced chronic frenzy, and creating healthy habits

become illuminated and expanded when one gets to the heart of what matters most.

For nurses, who are the most influential force for health care reform in America, the time to emulate wellness has never been more critical. The clear and compelling Institute of Medicine (2010) report, *The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health*, has provided a golden opportunity and a unique platform for nurses, specifically nurse leaders, to lead by example. By creating healthy habits for ourselves, we flourish as ambassadors of self-care for our patients, families, colleagues, and communities. \$

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