

Professional Development Module

Theories/Philosophies of Nursing

Introduction to Theory

- Nursing is a unique healthcare discipline in which nurses provide others with a service based on their knowledge and skill. Nursing thus has two essential aspects: a body of knowledge and the application of that knowledge through nursing practice.
- Organisation and structure of facts and events are present in large bodies of knowledge, through philosophies, concepts, theories, and processes.
- Philosophy: is the study of wisdom, fundamental knowledge, and the processes we use to develop and construct our perceptions of life. Philosophy provides a viewpoint and implies a system of values and beliefs. Every nurse's philosophy, developed through education and practice, forms the basis for giving nursing care.
- Concepts: like ideas, are abstract impressions organised into symbols of reality. Concepts describe objects, properties, and events and relationships among them. A group of concepts that follow an understandable pattern makes up a conceptual framework or model.
- **A theory:** is a group of concepts that describe a pattern of reality. A theory is a statement that explains or characterises a process, and occurrence, or an event and based on observed facts, but a theory cannot be proved directly or absolutely as can a fact. Theories arrange a group of related statements or concepts so that they give meaning to a series of events. Theories can be tested, changed, or used to guide research or to provide a base for evaluation.
- **A process:** is a series of actions, changes or functions intended to bring about a desired result. During a process, one takes systematic and continuous steps to meet a goal and uses both assessments and feedback to direct actions to meet the goal. A particular theory or conceptual framework directs how these actions are carried out. The delivery of nursing care within the nursing process is directed by the way specific frameworks and theories define the person (patient), the environment, health, and nursing.

Basic Processes in the Development of Nursing Theories

- Nursing theory, as defined by Barnum (1998), “*attempts to describe or explain the phenomenon (process, occurrence or event) called nursing.*” Nursing theory differentiates nursing from other disciplines and activities in that it serves the purposes of describing, explaining, predicting and controlling desired outcomes of nursing care practices.

General Theories

- **General Systems Theory:** this theory describes how to break whole things into parts and then learn how the parts work together in “systems”. It emphasises relationships between the whole and the parts and describes how parts function and behave. These concepts may be applied to different kinds of systems, for example, cultures in sociology, organs in anatomy, and health in nursing.
- **Adaptation Theory:** this theory defines adaptation as the adjustment of living matter to other living things and to environmental conditions. Adaptation is a continuously occurring process that effects change and involves interaction and response.
- **Developmental Theory:** this theory outlines the process of growth and development of humans as orderly and predictable, beginning with conception and ending with death. Although the pattern has definite stages, the progress and behaviours of an individual within each stage are unique. The growth and developmental of an individual are influenced by heredity, temperament, emotional and physical environment, life experiences, and health status. Two theorist who made important contributions are Eric Erikson and Abraham Maslow

Nursing Theory

- Nursing theories identify and define interrelated concepts important in nursing and clearly state the relationships between and among these concepts. Nursing theories should also increase the nursing profession’s body of knowledge by generating research to guide and improve practice. Overall, nursing theory guides nurses by providing a knowledge base, organising concepts, providing guidelines for practice, and identifying nursing care goals.

Common Concepts in Nursing Theories

- Four concepts common in nursing theory that influence and determine practice are:
 - The person (patient)
 - The environment

- Health
- Nursing
- Of the four concepts , the most important is that of the person. The focus of nursing, regardless of definition or theory, is the person.

Nursing Theory and Nursing Practice

- Historical Perspectives and Influences
 - Nightingale's definition and Belief
 - Cultural Influences on Nursing
 - Educational Influences on Nursing
 - Developmental of Scientific Base for Nursing
- Evolution of Nursing Theory
 - Research and Publishing in Nursing
 - Educational Advances in Nursing

Value of Nursing Theory

- Even though nurses have difficulty agreeing on precise definitions of nursing, theory-based nursing directs nurses toward a common goal, with the ultimate outcome being improved patient care. Nursing theory provides rational and knowledgeable reasons for nursing actions, based on organised, written descriptions of what nursing is and what nurses do.
- Additionally, nursing theory gives nurses the knowledge base necessary for acting and responding appropriately in nursing care situations, provides a base for discussion, and ideally, helps resolve current nursing issues. Furthermore nursing theory gives nurses who know and practice theory better problem-solving skills, so that nursing actions are better organised, considered, and purposeful. Nursing theory also prepares nurse to question assumptions and values in nursing, thus further defining nursing and increasing the knowledge base.

Theoretical Frameworks for Nursing

Key Points of Selected Nursing Theories

- Theorist: Virginia Henderson
- Central Theme: Definition of Nursing
- Emphasis of Nursing: to assist the patient to acquire or maintain independence.
- Theorist: Dorothy E. Johnson
- Central Theme: Caring for the whole patient to facilitate behaviours necessary to prevent illness.
- Emphasis of Nursing: Focus is on patient behaviours, assisting the patient to regain balance and health.

- Theorist: Imogene M. King
 - Central Theme: Individuals actively interact with others and with the environment and are changed by these experiences.
 - Emphasis of Nursing: Assist the patient to identify problems and establish and achieve goals.
- Theorist: Madeline Leininger
 - Central Theme: Nursing is a transcultural care profession; care is the central area of concern.
 - Emphasis of Nursing: Using culturally based nursing actions in culture care preservation, accommodation, and reconstruction.
- Theorist: Myra E. Levine
 - Central Theme: The essence of nursing is human interaction.
 - Emphasis of Nursing: The foundation of all nursing interventions is conservation principles that maintain or restore health.
- Theorist: Betty Neuman
 - Central Theme: The patient's reaction to stressors in the environment.
 - Emphasis of Nursing: Nursing interventions can be carried out on three levels of prevention.
- Theorist: Dorothea E. Orem
 - Central Theme: The need for self-care to maintain life, health, and well-being.
 - Emphasis of Nursing: A person needs nursing when a health-related self-care deficit exists.
- Theorist: Hildegard E. Peplau
 - Central Theme: The nurse-patient relationship
 - Emphasis of Nursing: Using a therapeutic relationship and communications to solve problems.
- Theorist: Martha E. Rogers
 - Central Theme: Humans are the centre of nursing's purpose.
 - Emphasis of Nursing: To develop a science of nursing.
- Theorist: Calista Roy
 - Central Theme: A decrease in body integrity creates a need state, followed by an act of behaviour
 - Emphasis of Nursing: All nursing activity is aimed at promoting adaptation to health and illness.
- Theorist: Jean Watson
 - Central Theme: Caring is a human-t-human process demonstrated through therapeutic interpersonal interactions.

- Emphasis of Nursing: Caring is the mechanism by which nurses help individuals and groups reach self-actualisation, maintain or attain health, or die a peaceful death.

Applying Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks in Practice

- The major concepts of a chosen model or theory guide each step of the nursing process. The concepts serve as categories to guide the nurse in determining what information is relevant and should be collected in making assessments and formulating nursing diagnosis. The concepts also suggest the appropriate types of nursing interventions and patient outcomes to be included in the care plan.
- The aims of nursing are the same for all nursing theorists, but the values, assumptions, and beliefs individualise each theory when it is applied to the giving of nursing care. Theoretical frameworks of nursing provide a focus for nursing activities.
- The ultimate goal of each framework, however is a holistic patient care, individualised to meet needs, promote health and prevent or treat illness.