

Commentary on “Self-Care Activities Captured Through Discussion Among Community-Dwelling Older Adults”

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The purpose of Dunn and Riley-Doucet’s study was to identify holistic self-care activities used to maintain health by older adults. Four focus groups were held to collect data from 28 older adults who were recruited from an urban senior center and senior housing complex. The majority of the participants were non-White (61%) women (79%). The study was guided by Dossey, Keegan, and Guzzetta’s (2000) holistic nursing model. Interview questions were developed based on the model and were specific to biological, psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions of holistic being. Data on self-care activities were coded as “doing activities” or “being activities” within these four dimensions. The five themes that described holistic well-being included having faith ways, positive energy, support systems, wellness activities, and affirmative self-appraisal.

A focus group methodology was appropriate for gathering research data. Loeb, Penrod, and Hupcey (2006) stated that focus groups are an efficient and effective way of gathering data from older adults and are especially useful for uncovering attitudes and beliefs that may not have been discovered from surveys and individual interviews. The researchers stated that men were underrepresented in the first two focus groups and were not speaking freely. Indeed, a review of Table 1 shows that there was only one man in each of the first two groups (Dunn & Riley-Doucet, 2007). Loeb et al. stated that mixed-gender groups must have at least 2 of each gender to promote comfort for open discussion. Although an additional focus group was held, only 3 men were present. Thus, the male voice may not be as clearly heard in this study.

This study makes an important contribution to holistic nursing practice by identifying activities used by older adults for maintaining health and well-being. Approximately 80% of older adults in the United States have at least one chronic condition, and another 50% have 2 or more (National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, 2004). Despite nursing’s claim to a holistic idea of health, the medical model continues to influence the promotion of healthy behaviors. Thus, understanding the holistic self-care activities older adults are currently using is important for nurses in determining effective health promotion strategies.

The researchers identify self-care activities that holistic nurses may wish to use with their older adult clients. Faith ways, including going to church and using prayer, were useful for maintenance of physical health by preventing participants from smoking, drinking alcohol, and eating certain foods. Keeping busy is important, and suggested activities included house cleaning, gardening, volunteering, taking classes, dancing, going to movies, and taking up a hobby. The maintenance of support systems was also identified as important. Feeling connected by receiving visits by health care providers, attending support groups, and visiting with family and friends were all important. Although the researchers identified the importance of social

support for healthy well-being, they did not offer strategies for promoting social support, especially with older adults who do not reside in a senior housing complex or attend senior centers. Holistic nurses must be aware of the specific resources available within their own community to ensure connectedness in older adults with others. Examples include parish nursing programs, home visiting programs, adopt-a-grandparent programs, elder care services, and support groups for bereavement and specific chronic health conditions. Older adults with financial resources may be encouraged to purchase a computer and use the Internet to maintain connections with family and friends. Mobile older adults can be encouraged to join their local senior citizen center. Homebound elders are likely to need the most support, and nurses must strive to find ways to ensure that these older adults are able to maintain meaningful connections with others.

Wellness activities were also important for maintenance of health. Specific activities included taking medications, using medical devices (such as braces and support stockings), eating a proper diet, exercising, and getting rest. In addition, meditation, listening to music, and consciously putting bad things out of one's mind were used. The final activity identified was having affirmative self-appraisal. Being helpful to others and being thankful and hopeful in life allowed these participants to deal with physical pain and maintain holistic health.

In summary, though the research findings described can only be generalized to the participants in this study, important strategies that holistic nurses may use in assisting older adults with health promotion are shared. It is important to remember that when providing holistic nursing interventions, the unique needs of each individual must be considered. When interventions are developed that match the personal needs of each older adult, health promotion activities are more likely to be successful.

References

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