“Wellbeing: Can Nurses do more to Transform the Lives of their Patients and Themselves?”

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This presentation will focus on the concept of wellbeing and will challenge current models of healthcare provision. The need for an increase in psychosocial care for patients will be discussed; and the issue of stress and burnout in nurses explored. Directions for nurses to transform the lives of patients and themselves; will be provided.

I have been researching in the area of wellbeing for nearly 30 years. Wellbeing is a positive mental and physical state. Our understanding of what constitutes wellbeing and strategies to optimise and promote this has increased in recent years, with disciplines such as Positive Psychology and Neuroscience contributing. However, current healthcare models are predominately biomedical and do not incorporate wellbeing as a desired outcome. The primary focus of biomedical model is physical, leaving minimal attention to psychological, social and environmental needs that are often associated with illness and injury.

My Master’s research revealed the stress and frustration experienced by nurses, when trying to provide psychosocial as well as physical care to their patients. In my PhD research, which explored the experience of patients in hospital, I developed a substantive theory about Emotional Comfort. This was a positive state of psychological wellbeing, sought by patients, who perceived that it assisted with their recovery. In these projects and in subsequent work, the struggle of both nurses and patients to facilitate wellbeing within a biomedical model of care was apparent. In addition, the ongoing need to improve the psychosocial care of patients has been readily evident in other literature worldwide for decades. There are indications that a greater focus on the wellbeing of patients would have economic benefits, enabling people to function better within the community, reducing hospital admissions and the burden of disease.

As advocates of healthcare, nurses should be leaders and facilitators of wellbeing, however, high levels of stress and burnout are currently being reported, together with concerns about nurse retention in the workforce. Although advances in healthcare and technology have brought many benefits, increased demands for hospital care and interventions have escalated healthcare costs and stretched resources. Increasingly, nurse staffing levels are insufficient, patient safety issues reported, and staff lacking compassion observed.

In Western Australia, I have been leading a program of research over several years that has aimed to improve the wellbeing of nurses, and in turn, improve the psychosocial care of patients. Recent piloting of this program has indicated that there is a pressing need to educate nurses about wellbeing. By increasing nurses’ personal capacity to cope with stress through wellbeing strategies, the quality of care received by patients is likely to be improved. Now is the time for nurses to be educated about wellbeing and embrace this knowledge to transform the lives of patients and themselves.