

Art, Science, or Both? Keeping the Care in Nursing

Tayray Jasmine, PhD, MSN, RN^{a,b,*}

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• Art • Science • Nursing • Caring • Evidence-based • Research

Historically, nurses were subservient, responsive to the orders, instructions, and direction of other disciplines, specifically physicians. Physicians delegated tasks to nurses, and nurses did not necessarily question physician orders.¹ Nursing was primarily a profession of giving, and it lacked the application of scientific methodology to inform nursing practice. Nursing had not formulated formal principles of practice or evidence for procedures performed. Independent, nurse-directed regulations did not exist; autonomous decision making was limited.

In the past, the orientation of nursing was one of mother surrogate, tending and watching over a dependent ward of patients, or of a helping person. Today, laypeople often define nursing as taking care of the sick to help them get well—a definition based on media images and household ideas that is in large part a reality. The problem with this description, however, is that it limits nursing to a task-oriented, robotic duty and inaccurately depicts the complex union of art and science in nursing.² A definition of nursing focused on clinical hands-on functions is limiting and inconclusive. Consequently, this definition undermines the professionalization of nursing, failing to reflect its artistic and scientific foundations.

Professional nurses have now shed the handmaiden role to become caregivers on the frontlines of health care. Nursing is known as a scientific profession based on research, theory, and concepts—centered on the art of caring and focused on health care outcomes. Nursing is composed of a diverse set of practices and functions, each requiring specialized knowledge and skills. Therefore, nursing functions do not define the essence of nursing. The essence of professional nursing care is best embraced by an approach that includes its artistic and scientific dimensions.

CARING: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR NURSING

Through years of nursing research, caring has systematically evolved as a distinct characteristic of nursing and is now widely regarded as the theoretical framework

^a Harris County Hospital District, 2525 Holly Hall, Harris County, Houston, TX 77054, USA

^b Collective Healthcare Services, LLC, 2623 Sunbird Court, Pearland, TX 77584, USA

* Collective Healthcare Services, LLC, 2623 Sunbird Court, Pearland, TX 77584.

E-mail address: tayrayj@comcast.net