Comprehensive Care: Looking Beyond the Presenting Problem

Advanced Practice Nurses (APNs) have an excellent opportunity to provide comprehensive care to patients in the fragmented realm of healthcare (Cumbie, Conley, & Burman, 2004). In the present healthcare delivery model, one can become focused on only one area of a patient’s health. But quality care depends on a holistic approach, integrating patient needs collectively in the plan of care. This means taking into account the patient’s entire health picture, as well as individual health goals and the family support system situation.

As nurses, we consider individuals in a broader sense of health and needs. The idea that a patient would be identified by a health problem is contrary to the practice of the APN. We consider the patient’s total history, as well as current health, to determine the best plan. Although the present-day healthcare delivery model may lead one to focus on the current problem, the APN recognizes that this is neither in the best interest of the patient nor his or her long-term health.

In every patient’s story, there is more to total health than the presenting complaint. The APN understands this and works to integrate the best plan of care. This is not always easy or straightforward, as the patient presents with various needs. In a comprehensive care approach, the APN provides a type of information therapy, equipping a patient to make shared decisions (Da Silva, 2012), thereby taking ownership of his or her health.

Determining the patient’s history leads to a more complete understanding of the review of systems. This path leads the nurse to ask more detailed questions about patient history and may lead to the cause of the presenting problem(s). Considering the importance of holistic, comprehensive care, I recently read a story that highlighted this point.

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An 80-year-old male patient wanted to become a certified department of transportation (DOT) driver. He had met all of the qualifications other than the physical exam. While taking his history, the APN noticed the patient had high blood pressure. Conversation made it clear there had been no attention to his blood pressure in many years. Although his goal was only to get a DOT license, the comprehensive care provided by the APN helped him understand his health risks. Having lived a long life, the patient said he took his health for granted. He was grateful the nurse helped him realize his health was about more than passing the physical exam. This proactive approach to protecting his health led him to reconsider his own health risks.

We are reminded APNs can make a difference in caring collectively for a patient’s health. Nurses must look beyond an isolated concern. APNs with a Christian worldview carefully address concerns for spiritual, mental, and physical well-being. Jesus made it clear our concern should be on more than what meets the eye. When Jesus healed the paralyzed man let down through the roof by his friends (Mark 2:1-12), he saw their faith and said, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” Then he physically healed the man. Jesus healed people’s presenting physical complaint but also was a bridge to care for their long-term spiritual needs as well.

APNs can follow Jesus’ model of addressing the presenting complaint and using that as a bridge to care for patients’ overall concerns. It is exciting to consider the impact each nurse can have on the long-term health promotion of patients. APNs have the chance to reflect Christlikeness to each patient through compassionate interactions. Although the number of patients to care for each day may be extensive, the names in those lines represent individuals Christ has called us to love and serve. At each visit, we are given a glimpse into the individual’s unique health needs. This provides opportunities to provide holistic, comprehensive care for the individual. In this mindset, we are able to impact the chronic diseases that plague our society resulting from unhealthy choices. The impact can be endless.

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