



Westberg Institute  
for Faith Community Nursing

# Wholistic Health Position Statement

The faith community nurse (FCN) provides **wholistic health care** (ANA & HMA, 2012). This position statement aims to answer:

1. What did Granger Westberg say about wholistic health?
2. What is wholistic health?
3. How is faith community nursing similar to and different from holistic nursing?

First, it is important to address the challenge that exists in using the descriptor *wholistic*. Whenever the word is entered into the computer as text, it is immediately selected as a spelling error. This is because the term *wholistic* is not a recognized descriptor in standard dictionaries or the National Library of Medicine's controlled vocabulary thesaurus (MeSH). There are 27,883 descriptors in 2016 MeSH with over 87,000 entry terms that assist in finding the most appropriate MeSH descriptor. Until the descriptor of *wholistic* is added to the MeSH list, this will continue to be an inconvenience. Because of this, many faith community nursing authors and researchers use the MeSH corrected descriptor, *holistic*.

The correct descriptor for the work of faith community nurses is *wholistic*.

## Use of Descriptor *Wholistic* by Granger Westberg

*Scope and Standards of Practice: Faith Community Nursing* (ANA & HMA, 2012) states that the roots of the practice guide the use of the descriptor *wholistic health care*.

“Rev. Dr. Granger Westberg used the term wholistic health to define a whole or completely integrated approach to health and health care that integrates the physical and spiritual aspects of the whole person. The principles of wholistic health arose from the understanding that humans strive for wholeness in their relationship to their God or higher power, their families, the society, and the environment in which they live. Based on its historic meaning, wholistic is the preferred spelling when referring to the health care provided by faith community nurses” (p. 7).

In Tubesing, Holinger, Westberg and Lighter (1977), Westberg defined wholistic health care as:

“... the metaphysical affirmation of body, mind, and spirit integrated in a whole, independent of and greater than the sum of its parts. In practice, wholistic health care means actively searching with a patient all dimensions of his/her life (physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, interpersonal) for causes and symptoms of disease, then creatively exploring these same modalities for treatment strategies to restore or maintain health” (p. 219).

Westberg (1961), in *When Minister and Doctor Meet*, used the term *wholistic health care* to describe his work. His editor at Harper and Row advised him that he had spelled wholistic wrong. He wrote them, “Please let me spell it with a w. It will make it easier for people to understand the concept of wholeness.” They agreed to it (Westberg, J., 2015, p. 127).

Jane Westberg writes in her book, *Gentle Rebel: The Life and Work of Granger Westberg* (2015) that Granger's work took into account the whole person in providing personalized care, which was

comprehensive in nature and embraced the notion of self-responsibility, health promotion, and health education and emphasized prevention medicine (p. 199). He stated that traditional health care and wholistic health care were very similar. The difference is the intentional emphasis on prevention health and spiritual care. He stated, "... we are not ashamed to speak about God. We believe that Christ is the great physician" (p. 214).

### **Westberg on "Holistic" Health Care versus "Wholistic" Health Care**

Westberg was concerned with the error others made in describing the work as "holistic" instead of "wholistic." He stated "while we [wholistic care providers] believe in much of their [holistic care providers] basic philosophy, our method of practice is more traditional ... We must meet them [patients] first where they feel comfortable and then introduce them to methods of treatment that deal with more than just the physical dimension" (Westberg, J., 2015, p. 203).

In *Granger Westberg Verbatim: A Vision for Faith and Health* (Peterson, 1982), Westberg writes, "There is great ferment on the West Coast around the general subject of holistic medicine. I salute them for their willingness to test new ways to get to the cause and cure of illness. However, a number of people are confused by the similarity of our names. I have tried very hard to keep our project within the fold of traditional American medicine and religion. I have regularly conferred with officers or staff at the American Medical Association, the Association of American Medical Colleges, and bishops and officers of mainline Christian churches. They have all encouraged our innovative programs as long as we keep within reasonable limits" (p. 43).

### **Evolutional Conceptual Analysis of Wholistic Health**

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"Evolutional Conceptual Analysis of Wholistic Health" (Ziebarth, 2016) reveals that a total of 63 sources of literature (including those aforementioned) were used to answer the questions: (a) How is the concept *wholistic* used in literature in regard to health care delivery? (b) What is wholistic health care? (c) What essential attributes of the conceptual model *Faith Community Nursing* align with the essential attributes of wholistic health care? The study's results provided several theoretical definitions that may assist to understand the term *wholistic health care* in regard to the faith community nursing specialty.

- **Wholistic Health** is the human experience of optimal harmony, balance, and function of the interconnected and interdependent unity of the spiritual, physical, mental, and social dimensions. The quality of wholistic health is influenced by human development at a given age and an individual's genetic endowments, which operate in and through one's environments, experiences, and relationships.
- **Wholistic Health Care** is the assessment, diagnosis, treatment and prevention of wholistic illness in human beings to maintain wholistic health or enhance wholistic healing. Identified wholistic health needs are addressed simultaneously by one or a team of allied health professionals in the provision of primary care, secondary care, and tertiary care. Wholistic health care is patient-centered and considers the totality of the person (e.g., human development at a given age, genetic endowments, disease processes, environment, culture, experiences, relationships, communication, assets, attitudes, beliefs, and lifestyle behaviors). *Patient-centered* refers to the patient as active participant in deciding the course of care. Essential attributes of wholistic health care are faith (spiritual) integrating, health promoting, disease managing, coordinating, empowering, and accessing health care. Wholistic health care may occur in collaboration with a faith-based organization. Faith community volunteers may be mobilized to support and promote individual, family, and community health.
- **Wholistic Illness** is the human experience of declining harmony, balance, or function of the interconnected and interdependent unity of the spiritual, physical, mental, and social dimensions. Wholistic illness occurring in one dimension impacts other dimensions. Severity of wholistic illness is influenced by human development at a given age and an individual's genetic endowments, which operate in and through one's environments, experiences, and relationships.
- **Wholistic Healing** is the human experience of movement towards optimal harmony, balance, and function of the interconnected and interdependent unity of spiritual, physical, mental, and social

dimensions. Wholistic healing occurring in one dimension impact other dimensions. Wholistic healing is influenced by human development at a given age and an individual's genetic endowments, which operate in and through one's environments, experiences, and relationships.

- **Wholistic Health Care Providers** are health care professionals knowledgeable and skillful in the essential attributes (i.e., faith [spiritual] integrating, health promoting, disease managing, coordinating, empowering, and accessing health care). They possess personal character traits that allow them to deliver ethically sound unbiased care. They are attentive, responsive, and intentional in providing services that encompass the interconnected and interdependent unity of spiritual, physical, mental, and social dimensions of every patient. The relationship to the patient (i.e., person, family, or community) is of central importance. They are accessible, approachable, available, and accountable to patients. They are mindful of self, patient, and context in the provision of care.

- A **Patient** is an interconnected and interdependent unity of spiritual, physical, mental, and social dimensions. The quality of the unity is influenced by human development at a given age and genetic endowments, which operate in and through one's environments, experiences, and relationships.

- **Consequence of Wholistic Health Care** is the maintenance of wholistic health or the enhancement of wholistic healing.

### **Spiritual look at Wholistic Health**

In a recent article regarding the health of missionaries (Williams, 2108), we are reminded that God intended for His people to live a healthy lifestyle and to take care of their temples. *“Beloved, I wish above all things that thou prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth (3 John 1:2). The soul flourishes when one's health flourishes in maintaining physical, nutritional, social, emotional, and spiritual in harmony with one another. God intended for His people to live a healthy life glorifying the Father and to serve him. Third book of John chapter 1 gives one a thorough and clear understanding that God intends for his people to have **wholistic health** from head-to-toe, to be good in Spirit, and inevitably this leads to the connection of mind, body and spirit”* (p. 13).

### **Comparing Holistic Nursing and Faith Community Nursing**

Just like faith community nursing, holistic nursing is recognized by the American Nurses Association as a specialty nursing practice with a defined scope and standards of practice (Dossey & Keegan, 2012, p. 62). A holistic nurse acts to heal the whole person and integrates complementary and alternative approaches into clinical practice. Trained in both fields, holistic nurses serve as a bridge between conventional healing and complementary and alternative healing practices. They specialize in one or more methods of healing, such as acupuncture, chiropractic, or energetic healing and work in a variety of settings (p. 67).

There are similarities and differences between holistic nursing and faith community nursing.

#### **Similarities**

- Faith community nursing and holistic nursing are recognized by the ANA as specialty nursing practices.
- Faith community nurses and holistic nurses are registered nurses and operate under the legal authority of each state's Nurse Practice Act and policies.
- They are both guided by the nursing scope and standards of practice.
- They are each guided by their individualized specialty scope and standards of practice.
- They both use the term *whole person* to describe the work they do.
- They both have specialized knowledge and training.

#### **Differences**

- Holistic nurses have specialized knowledge of complementary and alternative healing practices.
- Holistic nurses provide alternative methods of healing, such as acupuncture, chiropractic, energetic healing and others.
- Holistic nurses work in a variety of settings.

- Faith community nurses have specialized knowledge in the intentional care of the spirit as part of the process of promoting wholistic health and preventing or minimizing illness.
- Faith community nurses provide intentional spiritual care, participate in spiritual leadership and practices, and integrate health and faith.
- Faith community nurses work in or with a faith community and often mobilize volunteers to assist in caring for others.
- Faith community nurses routinely coordinate, implement, and sustain ongoing activities such as support groups.
- Faith community nurses routinely utilize and apply survey results.
- Faith community nurses are both multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary in resourcing and referring.
- Essential attributes of faith community nursing and wholistic health care are faith (spiritual) integrating, health promoting, disease managing, coordinating, empowering, and accessing health care.

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## Citation

Westberg Institute (2019) Wholistic Health. Retrieved from <https://www.westberginstitute.org>