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Enhancing Patient Well-being: Apply Positive Psychology in Nursing Practice

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Abstract

Objective: Positive psychology is the emerging concept in the medical field and has shown the positive effects on one's well-being. This paper highlights the application of PERMA model in nursing practice.

Method: The model applied in the clinical area to access improvement in patient's well-being. The concept of positive psychology's applicability is discussed with the real life examples.

Result: The PERMA model when applied yields a positive impact on patient's health and overall well-being.

Conclusion: The learning outcomes of this research will help the people in health care to understand the relationship between positive psychology and nursing practices for the wellbeing of patients. And if one tries to apply the concepts of positive psychology in clinical area then it can promote speedy recovery of the patients.

Keywords: Positive Psychology, PERMA Model, Nurse-Patient Relationship, Care

Introduction and Objective

Most of the people think that today in this fast moving era, life expectancy is decreasing because of chronic diseases, under nutrition, family conflicts and environmental factors [1]. Despite, others think that the life expectancy can be increased by pharmacotherapy or other treatment modalities [2]. Why do people always think of morbidities and lengthy expensive treatments? Why people do not focus on the inner strength that can be used as a healing source? These questions persuaded me to write this paper, to highlight the important and positive other side of the coin that is mostly overlooked.

In hospitals, positivity plays a vital role in patient centered care. Nurses are those professionals who stay with the patient most of the time thus; they contribute a lot in patient's better prognosis. In order to achieve optimum level of wellness it is very important for health care professionals to understand the concept of positive psychology [3].

Martin Seligman first introduced the term positive psychology in 1998 [4, 5]. It is stated by Seligman & Mihaly (2000, p.5) that positive psychology is "a science of positive subjective experience, positive individual traits, and positive institutions promises to improve quality of life and prevent the pathologies that arise when life is barren and meaningless". The three dimensions of positive psychology are subjective level that includes positive emotions, individual level that focuses on individual positive traits and

group level that focuses on development of positive institution [6]. Currently, "PERMA" a new model is introduced.

To begin with, the positive psychology, it is significant to understand a model of scientific theory of happiness that is "PERMA" proposed by Martin Seligman in his book Flourish [7]. Where "P" stands for positive emotions, "E" stands for engagement, "R" stands for relationship, "M" stands for meaning and "A" stands for achievement. Successful completion of all these stages results in happy life ahead. In clinical context, every health care professional is required to apply concepts of positive psychology to improve patient's mental as well as physical health. In a clinical setting a nurse's job is not only medication administration but also the focus is on holistic care. This includes understanding patients' emotions, helping them identify their virtues and strengths, making trustful relationships and assisting the patient to achieve target goals [8]. This paper would elaborate PERMA model and its practical application in a bedside nurse's care.

Method

In this section, the PERMA model is discussed and its relationship is established with real life clinical experiences in nursing practice. Emotion is the subjective part of a person's life that varies from one situation to another. Positive emotions allow a person to live satisfied life with glimpses of glad past, cherish present and hoping for a bright future [9]. Positive emotion is the first stage of PERMA model. It helps a person to perform better at work, boost physical health, strengthen relationship and inspires to be creative. It gives optimistic view about future and give hope to excel in every task of life.

Once I encountered a patient with drastic metastasized cancer. She had severe side effects of chemotherapy and was in dreadful pain. Whenever she passes urine, she felt burning sensation and had crying spells. She did not allow anyone to come near her as she thought that others would increase her pain. I along with staff nurse counseled the patient emphasizing on positive aspects on her body after hygiene care and gave bed bath to her. After that, she felt much relaxed and I saw a pleasant smile on her face. This little smile inspired me. Once on duty, patient's spouse thanked me for taking care of his wife and stated that nurses smiling face is so contagious that it makes patients as well as attendant's condition better.

While analyzing this scenario it is evident that positive approach of a nurse benefited the patient. Besides this, it also gives internal satisfaction and happiness to the nurse. It allows the nurse to look forward for positive outcomes. Although the patient was at the last stage of cancer and her survival chances were low, nurses intervened with palliative care that soothed the patient and reduced her anxiety.

Next stage is engagement. It is a process through which one is connected to a particular work at a particular time or gets fully absorbed in the given task. Mindfulness, which means paying close attention on responsibilities, is a skill through which engagement can be achieved in health care setting [10]. It results in both creativity and productivity of nurses

The concept of engagement can be appreciated in a clinical scenario in which I observed a patient with obsessive-compulsive disorder. Patient did not comb her hair since one month. When I heard that, I became judgmental and thought that her family should take care of her about personal grooming and I thought that now it would be very difficult to comb intense tufts of hair but later I realized that it is my responsibility to improve physical and mental well-being of patient. I showed empathy towards patient and I was focused on my task. Finally, after 2 and a half hour of hard focused work, I was able to comb the patient's hair.

It is only when a nurse engages her towards a specific task, that she can achieve the targeted goal. It results both in patient's physical well-being and nurse's internal joy. Likewise, a patient can engage himself in relaxation activities such as meditation, yoga and in our context, prayers and religious practices are such activities that can relax the patient and free them from negative thoughts [11].

Third stage is of relationship. It is the bond between two people that keep them together. In clinical setting nurse-patient, relationship is very important. A helping relationship is based on mutual respect and trust [12]. It allows a nurse to understand patient's physical, emotional and spiritual needs and allow the nurse to apply the basic knowledge and skills to improve quality of life of patients.

In a clinical setting I encountered a patient who admitted with complain of Xanax over dose. When I tried to initiate a conversation, she refused to talk to me. I gave her space and asked her to call me whenever she feels comfortable. Afterwards when I entered patient's room I saw her crying. I gave therapeutic touch and maintained silence, after sometime she started telling everything that was bothering her. She ventilated her feelings and was relaxed.

Looking back to the scenario, as the nurse used therapeutic communication skills that include maintaining silence, therapeutic

touch, listening attentively [13]. It becomes easy for the nurse to communicate with the patient. It builds trust and balances the relationship between patient and nurse. Because of such a relationship, patient could confide her feelings. It enhances patient's physical and mental well-being as sharing reduces stress and burden.

Fourth stage is of meaning. Meaning is all about identifying one's own highest strengths and abilities and using them in the service of something one believes is larger than one self [14]. Identifying meaning of life is important for both nurse and patient. It allows every individual to lead an effective life.

In psychiatric ward once, I was assigned with a patient who was suffering from bipolar affective disorder. On interview, I observed that patient has already left the things, which previously were pleasurable for her. She was experiencing loneliness and showed disinterest in her surroundings. I counseled the patient. During counseling session patient verbalized that she was always interested in arts and craft but did not get any platform to polish her skills. After that, I took her to occupational therapy room where she started making a bracelet and was socializing with other patients. Patient showed her interest and identified her own strength and interest, which allows her to get out of depression.

For a nurse it is very important to understand the meaning of her own life. If a nurse knows clearly about her strengths then she can make effective use of her strengths in patient care [15]. The nurse should also be conscious about her profession. Some nurses work half-heartedly, most of the time thinking how they ended up in this profession. That is the reason behind nurses working with a negative mindset. Positive psychology can only be developed when they realize the meaning of their job. It is prime responsibility of a nurse to probe patient and dig out the strengths of patient as nurse did in the above-mentioned scenario. This component builds self-esteem and resilience in patients. Hence, it enhances patient's quick recovery.

Last stage in PERMA model is achievement. Setting goals in one's life and successfully achieving those goals refers to achievement [16]. Achievement can be as simple as completing assignment on targeted time. For a nurse, completing every work by the end of the shift could be an achievement whereas, saving patient's life in emergency could be another achievement. From patient point of view, it is an achievement for a patient who has started walking for the first time after his major surgery. Alternatively, when a patient understands that he not only has to survive but also has to thrive with his chronic condition then it is also included in patient's achievement. It helps to build self-esteem and a sense of accomplishment in every individual [17].

Once in paediatric ward I encountered a patient who was suffering from diabetic ketoacidosis. She had serious complications and became very dependent on others. She was also not able to speak. We all nursing students decided to do something different to make the patient internally happy. So we all decorated her bed in the ward and we made beautiful cards for her. For consecutive two weeks we looked after her and improved her physical hygiene. After two weeks, she started speaking in bits and pieces. Her family was very happy and appreciated us for our efforts.

All the nursing students decided to do something different to cheer up the patient. The patient also tried to speak for the first time after

a long period. Thus, it was a great achievement for the patient and by seeing improvement in patient's condition; we felt a sense of accomplishment.

Result

Nurses already understand the concept of PERMA. Seligman has provided a concise road map to happiness that assists the nurses to develop well-being among them and in patients too. However, nurses are more prone to burnout syndrome that occurs due to persistent increased stress level [18]. Thus, it becomes difficult for them to apply concepts of positive psychology. If the concept of positive psychology is applied in the clinical area, then it can yield in better patient's outcomes.

Conclusion

Overall, we must know that nursing requires integration of positive psychology to elevate the standards of care. The awareness of positive psychology through PERMA model can help a nurse and a patient to increase well-being by focusing on combination of good feelings, fully engaging with life, living meaningfully, establishing supportive relationships and accomplishing goals. This positive approach in future will lessen the burden of morbidities and it will increase the life expectancy by positive feelings all around and an understanding that life is not only to survive but also to thrive.

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