

Encourage Your Nurses To “Care 4 Me”

In these challenging times, when nurses often have to do more with less, burnout is common. Some nurses are postponing retirement, some are working extra shifts and/or more than one job. Since it costs over \$60,000 to recruit and train a new nurse, caring for your nurses is a wise investment!

One of the best ways to retain nurses is to encourage them to care for themselves as they care for others. Yet, we often treat ourselves in ways that we would never treat someone we love or care for! That’s why I developed this **C.A.R.E. 4 M.E.** acronym, enforcing my messages to nurture our bodies, minds and spirits.

Connect with your **Higher Power.** Spiritual balance is as equally important as mind and body. Science has proven that people who believe in a Higher Power, pray, and attend religious gatherings are healthier and less depressed. Spend 15 minutes a day in prayer, meditation or reflection. Participate and connect with your religious community.

Ask for your **“juice.”** Take quiet time to access your life. Is it out of balance physically, mentally or spiritually? What do you need to achieve better balance? Ask for it (kindly), of yourself, your family and your workplace. When toddlers know what they need or want they ask for it until they get it! “I want my juice!” Determine what you need to balance your life. Ask for your “juice.”

Rest and sleep. Do you sometimes hear yourself say, “I get by on that much sleep,” or “I survive on this many hours”? Just getting by and surviving is not okay. You would never deprive a child of sleep, knowing it makes them sick and grumpy. That applies to you too. Lack of sleep is a stressor to our bodies. It increases anxiety and decreases coping skills. Fatigue can decrease our patience at work and increase the possibility of med errors. Research proves the human body requires 7-8 hours of sleep in a 24 hour period. Turn off TV and technology and get 8 hours of sleep per night.

Eat right You know about the four basic food groups and eating according to the food pyramid, you teach this to your patients. But how often do you practice what you teach? Consume the quantity and quality of food you know your body needs. And remember to drink—water that is. Studies prove that drinking five glasses of water a day decreases instances of colon, breast and bladder cancer. Eat (right!) drink (right!) and be merry.

4 times a day, Breathe! Deep relaxation breathing is one of the best and most effective tools for mental rest, relaxation and coping in stressful times. Rhythmic breathing releases not only stress and tension, but endorphins in our brains. Breathe In-2-3-4, Out – 2-3-4, over and over again, slow, deep, and easy from your abdomen, at a relaxing pace. Add a thought with each, perhaps breathing in thinking, “I am-two-three four” and out “relaxed-two-three-four.” For 15 minutes, 3-4 times a day, breathe slow, deep and easy.

Mind your mind. Implement the mental balance tools I teach. Practice positive thinking and visualization, knowing we get what we expect in life and what we think about. Positive thinking can change your body and your mind. Laugh 400 times a day, like children, because laughter *is* the best medicine! It lowers your blood pressure and heart rate, improves lung capacity, massages internal organs, increases memory and alertness, reduces pain, improves digestion, and lowers the stress hormones, cortisol and adrenalin. Forgive yourself and someone else. Organized religion and twelve step programs have long recognized the healing power of forgiveness. Those who fail to forgive have increased cardiovascular disease and lower immune-system function. Buddha, Jesus, and other spiritual figures taught this holy philosophy. It's not only good for our souls, but for our hearts and bodies. So starting today, forgive, yourself and others.

Exercise 3 times a week Research proves that thirty to forty minutes of brisk walking, three or four times a week has the same cardiovascular benefit as jogging. Another study shows the best way to boost metabolism is with moderate short exercises throughout the day. Taking the stairs, parking far away and walking to the store all count. Exercise lowers your risk of heart attack, diabetes, bone cancer, osteoporosis, arthritis, backache, high blood pressure, depression and stress. Walk 45 minutes a day, even in 15 minute increments. Incorporate exercise into your everyday life. Mow your lawn, garden, play ball with kids, vacuum to rock and roll!

Implementing these CARE4ME tools makes you happier and healthier and in a better place to care for yourself as you help take care of others.

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