



## Review article

# Theory of human caring: An application in nursing service and education

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## Abstract

As the world is changing in every second the health care system around the globe undergoes lots of reorganization. Values of nursing will only uphold when there is proper human caring. Watson's theory of human caring gives importance to the transpersonal relationship between the caregiver and the care recipient. Watson's humanistic, existential, and metaphysical conceptualization of human beings underpins her view of both the transpersonal caring relationship that is central to her theory and her conceptualization of health-illness. She sees human beings as beings-in-the-world with dimensions of mind-body-soul that, in health, exist in harmony. The factors which make the Watson's theory unique among other nursing theories are it stresses the importance of the lived experiences of both client and nurse and it acknowledges the unique dimensions of mind-body-spirit. Also, it focuses on the use of clinical Caritas process and the role of spirituality in caring the patient. According to the theory of human caring, the curriculum should involve the knowledge of human behavior and human responses. As this theory gives equal importance to both client and the caregiver, there is a great chance for the nurses to improve themselves. In theory of human caring, she describes nursing as a human science discipline and art as well as an academic clinical profession. Watson also put forward two research methodologies for studying the theory, Descriptive –empirical phenomenological research method and Transcendental-poetic expression of phenomenology. Various studies and researches were conducted to check the applicability of the theory of human caring and a few of the studies are discussed in this paper.

**Key words:** Theory of human caring, transpersonal relationship, clinical Caritas process.

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## 1. Introduction

Jean Watson [1940] is a world-famous nurse theorist who put forward the theory of human caring which incorporates the spirituality and spirit in caring the patient. She is the founder of Centre of human caring in Colorado.

According to Watson, the core concept of the theory of human caring is that humans cannot be treated as objects and that humans cannot be separated from self, other, nature and larger universe. Dr. Watson's caring philosophy is used to guide transformative models of caring and

healing practices for nurses and patients alike, in diverse settings worldwide. There are several factors which make the Watson's theory unique among other nursing theories. First, it stresses the importance of the lived experience not only of the client but also of the nurse [1]. Both come together in a caring moment that becomes part of the life history of each person. Second, the theory acknowledges the unique dimensions of mind-body-spirit without compromising the wholeness of the person. Watson's theory of human caring is highly influenced by the humanitarian and existentialistic principles [3].

Watson's theory of human caring is a middle range explanatory theory which gives prime importance to the human component of caring and the caring moment which involves the meeting between the nurses and the patient.

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Theory of human caring which deals with the spiritual content of the patient and the relationship of the body-mind, spirit, and soul. Concepts of the theory include transpersonal caring relationship, caring moment, caring consciousness, and clinical Caritas process. Theory of human caring focuses on the meta-paradigm concepts of human being and nursing. Watson was influenced by the works of Nightingale, Henderson, Leininger, Selye, Sarte, and, in particular, Carl Rogers. One of the unique features of Watson's Theory of Human Caring is that it stresses the importance of the lived experience not only of the client but also the nurse. It values multiple ways of knowing and supports a holistic, open approach to connect mind, body, and spirit. Her theory is consistent with a qualitative, not-experimental or observational research model. It is one of many nursing theories that help nurses frame practice and the nurse-client relationship. Caring theory embodies the body, mind, and spirit.

Watson views of health include the entire human being in the physical, social, aesthetic and moral realms. According to Watson, the "health refers to unity and harmony within the mind, body, and soul. Health is also associated with the degree of congruence between the self as perceived and the self as experienced" [3]. In this theory, he explained that process of nursing is a human to human caring.

Jean Watson describes the transpersonal caring relationship as a human-to-human connectedness whereby each is touched by the human center of the other. The transpersonal caring relationship mainly consists of three dimensions- self, phenomenal field and inter subjectivity. According to Watson, a transpersonal caring relationship connotes a particular kind of human care relationship – a union with another person – high regard for the whole person and their being-in-the-world. The term "transpersonal" means to go beyond one's own ego and beyond the given moment, as it allows one to reach deeper spiritual connections in promoting the patient's comfort and healing.

Transpersonal caring requires an authenticity of being and becoming. The transpersonal nurse can center consciousness on caring, healing, and wholeness, rather than on disease, illness, and pathology. This approach highlights the uniqueness of both the person and the nurse and the mutuality between the two individuals. As such, the one caring and the one cared-for both connect in a mutual search meaning, wholeness, and the spiritual transcendence of suffering. The goal of the transpersonal caring relationship involves protecting, enhancing, and preserving the person's dignity, humanity, wholeness, and inner harmony.

The second major element in Watson's theory involves the Caring Occasion/Caring Moment. A caring occasion occurs when the nurse and another come together with their unique phenomenal fields in a human-to-human transaction. This coming together becomes a focal point in space and time. It becomes transcendent when the actual caring occasion has a greater field of its own in a given moment.

A caring moment involves action and choice by both the nurse and other, presenting them with the opportunity to decide how to be in the moment and in the relationship. The caring moment is transpersonal when each feels a connection with the other at the spirit level. It transcends time and space, opening up new possibilities for healing and human connection.

The third but most important element in the theory of human caring is the clinical Caritas process. According to Watson clinical Caritas process refers to those aspects of nursing that actually potentiate therapeutic healing processes for both the one being cared for [3]. Creative factors represent the core of nursing which is grounded in the philosophy, science, and art of caring. Theory of human caring has great influence in the nursing practice as well as in nursing education. According to Watson, considerable education is needed in order to deliver the nursing care. Education should include the nurses' own life history and previous experiences, which provide opportunities for focused studies. Also, the curriculum should involve the knowledge of human responses and human behaviors. In Watson's theory of human caring, she put forward two research methodologies, Descriptive –empirical phenomenological research method and Transcendental-poetic expression of phenomenology.

Watson [1989] claimed that theory of human caring encompasses the whole of nursing; the emphasis, however, is placed on the interpersonal process between the caregiver and the care recipient. In this theory, Watson considers the person as a whole, and she gives importance to the spiritual content of the patient, mind, and soul. According to Watson, 'the goal of the nursing is to help persons gain a higher degree of harmony within the mind, body, and soul which generates self-knowledge, self-reverence, self-healing, and self-care processes while increasing diversity'. In this theory, Watson introduces the Creative factors which involve the caring process or nursing interventions. In nursing education, it should include the nurse's life history and previous experiences. Application of Watson's theory of human caring in nursing practice as well as in nursing education helps in improving the standards of caring as well as in teaching, and there are a lot of studies which substantiated this.

The purpose of the paper is to examine the theory of human caring by Jean Watson and the use of transpersonal caring relationship and Creative process in caring the patient as well as in nursing education. In this materialistic world importance of spirituality in caring the patient is hiking, and this paper also examines the concept of mind-body-spirit in nursing.

## Background

Many research studies were conducted on the basis of the Watson's theory of human caring. In this scenario, most of the researchers have a good interest in the Watson's theory of human caring because of its holistic nature. Some of the selected studies which support this theory are:

Erci B.J, Syan A.J, Tortumluoglu .G, Kilic D & Shino in 2003 conducted a study which assesses the effectiveness of Watson's caring model on the quality of life and blood pressure of patients with hypertension. Design of the study was one group pretest and posttest and the study included 52 patients with hypertension. The study was based on the home visits using Watson's theory of human caring in practice. According to this model, it considers the person holistically that includes social, physical and psychological environments. The researchers learned how the theory of human caring could develop their caring consciousness practice and to use this knowledge intentionally. Actually, the application began after one month preparation. The researchers maintained a trusting relationship and were expressive in positive and negative feelings.[2]

The result shows that there is an increase in the general well-being, physical symptoms and activity, sleep dysfunction, cognitive function, medical interaction and social participation and work performance. Care given according to Watson's caring Model was likely to increase the quality of life of hypertensive patients. The study reported that there was a statistically significant difference between the reduction of blood pressure and the education and nursing care given. The researchers concluded that care given according to Watson's Caring Model was likely to associate with increased quality of life of the patients and decreased blood pressure. The researchers believe that this is because the model considers persons holistically together with their physical, psychological and social environment, and increases problem-solving capacity.

A study conducted by Minnesota baccalaureate psychomotor skills faculty group [2006] titled 'Nursing students' caring behavior during blood pressure measurement' also used the theory of human caring as a background. The purpose of the study was to examine the effects of a teaching intervention designed to promote caring behaviors as students learn the psychomotor skill of blood pressure measurement. Baccalaureate nursing student participants were videotaped and evaluated at two points in time while performing the psychomotor skill of blood pressure measurement on a role-player. Role-players rated the students' caring behavior using the Role Player Survey of Caring Behaviors [4]. The study also examined the influence of the intentional teaching of caring in the psychomotor skills laboratory. Teaching strategies to promote the internalization of caring behaviors as a component of psychomotor skill acquisition was tested in the learning laboratory. The researchers hypothesized that the outcome would be student integration of caring behaviors as an integral part of psychomotor skill development.

The study was non experimental which involves the sample of baccalaureate nursing students who are beginning their nursing courses. Investigators evaluated the students in two points in time approximately eight weeks apart while performing the psychomotor skill of blood pressure measurement. This multisite study showed a significant increase in objective and subjective caring behaviors

during the performance of blood pressure measurement after a consistent teaching intervention. Although the collection points were eight weeks apart, the caring dimensions of blood pressure measurement were felt to be more closely related to the caring interventions than the practice that results with experience during that time frame. Another study by Sourial. S [1996] titled 'analysis and evaluation of Watson's theory of human care' contributes to theory – testing in nursing by testing an aspect of Watson's theory of human care. Watson believes that nursing is an inter subjective process and places a high value on the caring relationship. The purpose of this paper was analysis and evaluation of the theory [6].

Analysis of the theory of human caring concluded by stating that two areas needed further development. Firstly, in the presentation of her theory, philosophical underpinnings need to be more consistent and the theoretical definitions clearer. Secondly, in the research field, more work is needed to support all the Creative factors with greater understandings of spiritual domain. [11]

Another study, nursing student's perception of instructors caring: an instrument based on Watson's theory of human caring by Gail Holland and Natalie kasper [2004], describes the development and testing of an instrument to measure nursing students perception of instructor caring. At first, about 69 statements about instructors caring behavior was created on the basis of Watson's 10 narrative factors. Nursing students' perception of instructor caring [NSPIC] instrument uses a 6 point Likert scale for student responses to the statements. After testing the instrument with a small group, NSPIC was tested with 133 baccalaureate nursing students.

During the past three decades, caring has emerged as a central component of nursing [7]. Caring become the core value in nursing education and practice. If caring is the central focus of nursing, then attention should focus on the practical study and teaching of caring. The study of caring is vague as it is difficult to operationalize. When students perceive the climate of nursing education as caring, they learn a professional way of being. In a study of the major influences on senior nursing students' professional self-concept, Kelly [1992] found that faculty was the dominant role models of care. Within the hidden curriculum, the caring practices of the faculty are subtly communicated by the way they teach, their priorities and methods, and the way they interact with students.

In nursing education, caring is an evolutionary, transpersonal process between educators and students [7]. Transpersonal caring in nursing education occurs when nurse educators use teaching moment as caring occasions. The concept of nursing students' perceptions of instructor caring is defined as nursing students' awareness of a mutual and reciprocal connection between the self and the instructor that enables them to search for meaning and wholeness and grow as caring professional nurses. The concept reflects Watson's [2001] conceptualization of a transpersonal caring relationship. Watson's [2001] Carative

factors, which provided the blueprint for the scale items, are the “core” of nursing and the elements of the transpersonal caring relationship. Although Watson’s perspective on the Carative factors is evolving to caritas processes, she suggested that the Carative factors would provide a more stable framework for instrument development. The NSPIC, which uses a 6-point Likert-type scale, was designed to reflect the 10 Carative factors embedded in Watson’s Theory of Transpersonal Caring. A 6-point scale was selected to decrease the possibility of a neutral response. After pretesting, the NSPIC contained 48 statements about the nursing instructors’ caring behaviors. Students were asked to think about their most recent clinical instructor and indicate their level of agreement with each of the statements.

Watson also believes that nursing or caring is an inter subjective human process, where a high value is placed upon the caring relationship between the nurse and the recipient of care. Watson links her ‘human care process’ concepts to her ‘human care transactions’ concepts by the relational propositions that states ‘transpersonal caring is the full actualization of the human to the human transaction [8].

During this era of evidence-based practice, empirical evidence of caring interactions between students and faculty may help educators assess the effect of caring relationships on outcomes [8]. The NSPIC, based on Watson’s [1988] Theory of Transpersonal Caring, is a reliable and valid measure of nursing students’ perceptions of instructor caring. As a theory-based measure of caring, the NSPIC can be used as an outcome of the educational process to validate the influence of caring interactions between students and faculty on students’ ability to care. The 31-item scale is internally consistent and contains five factors that reflect transpersonal caring in nursing education. The 10 Carative factors that characterize human-to-human caring represent an interrelated cluster of characteristics that lead to the holistic development of human caring [7,8]. Even in the early stages of item development, it was clear that the items reflected more than one Carative factor.

### Synthesis of the theory

Jean Watson’s theory of human caring is a modern theory which focuses mainly on the human component of caring and the moment to moment encounter between one who is caring and one who is being cared for. Nowadays, a lot of studies and doctoral dissertations are being conducted on the basis of Jean Watson theory of human caring. According to Watson, caring includes physical, psychological, cultural, spiritual, and existential aspects. Caring science moves nurses from rigid health care doctrines to meaningful patterns and new insights of human caring. The theory supports a new direction: developing preventive rather than reactive approach to health problems.

Jean Watson’s theory of human caring is effectively used in various studies, in nursing practice as well as in nursing

education. The study conducted by Erci B.J , Syan A.J, Tortumluoglu .G , Kilic D & Shino in 2003 assess the effectiveness of Watson’s caring model on the quality of life and blood pressure of patients with hypertension. It is very evident that caring consciousness and transpersonal caring relationship, which are the main components of Watson theory, have a great impact on increasing the quality of life as well as decreasing the blood pressure. Patients’ condition improved as the researchers created a healing environment at all levels [physical as well as nonphysical]. The patients were assisted in the creative use of self and all ways of knowing as part of the caring process. [9] The researchers taught engagement in the artistry of caring-healing practices and with basic needs, with an intentional caring consciousness.

By providing care, according to Watson model, is a marked change in the blood pressure and quality of life. This is because the model considers person holistically together with their physical, psychological and social environment, and increases problem-solving capacity. The model can be integrated into direct patient-family care, and the model gives self-responsibility to the patient for self-health and also assists the nurses with their own caring-healing practices for self. This study effectively uses the concepts of Watson’s theory of human caring in patients with hypertension and results give more ideas for caring the patients in the future.

The article “Nursing Students’ Perceptions of Instructor Caring: An Instrument Based on Watson’s Theory of Transpersonal Caring” by researchers Wade & Kasper, develops and tests an instrument that is utilized to test nursing students perceptions on instructors caring. They used Watson’s Theory of Human Caring as the theoretical framework for their work. In nursing education, caring is an evolutionary, transpersonal process between educators and students [Watson, 1989]. Transpersonal caring in nursing education occurs when nurse educators use teaching moments as caring occasions. Caring occasions emerge from caring interactions that are perceived as relational and reciprocal. Transpersonal caring is realized through 10 Carative factors that characterize human-to-human caring [8]. Although the factors are hierarchical in nature, they are also an interrelated cluster of characteristics that lead to the holistic development of human caring [9]. The Carative factors, which represent the core of nursing and the primary ingredients of effective nursing practice, provide a language, structure, and order for studying and understanding nursing education and practice. This study describes the development and testing of an instrument to measure nursing students’ perceptions of instructor caring. Originally, 69 statements about instructors’ caring behaviors based on Watson’s 10 Carative factors were created. Then it pre-tested and reduced to 31 statements. This theory effectively utilizes the concepts of Watson’s theory of human caring. Carative factors provide the backbone for the framework for the test. These studies effectively utilize the concept of transpersonal caring relationship and influence of carrative factors in caring



behaviors of instructors. Following table shows the relationship of statements in the test with the carrative factors.

From the below table, we can identify that how effectively they utilize the Carative factors in developing the test. The 31-item scale is internally consistent and contains factors that reflect transpersonal caring in nursing education. The 10 Carative factors that characterize human-to-human caring represent an interrelated cluster of characteristics that lead to the holistic development of human caring.

Table no 1: Sample nursing students' perceptions of instructor caring (NSPIC) items with related carative factor number

Statement	Carative Factor(s)
My instructor:	
. Shows genuine interest in patients and their care.	1, 3
iInstills in me a sense of hopefulness for the future.	2, 3
Makes me feel like a failure.	2, 3, 4, 7
Expresses little interest in getting to know me as a person.	3, 4
Allows me to express my true feelings.	5
Discourages independent problem solving.	6, 7
Makes me nervous in the clinical laboratory.	7, 8
. Provides an environment that is conducive to learning.	8
. Focuses on completion of patient care tasks, rather than the patient's needs.	9
Helps me find personal meaning in my experiences.	10

Analysis of the theory from the studies and from the books shows that the 'theory of human caring' has a remarkable influence on the nursing practice as well as in nursing education. The concept of trans-personal caring relationship and clinical Caritas process give an idea of considering the patient as a whole and it helps to deliver care in a most effective way. Theory of human caring gives importance to the spiritual content of the patient and this concept helps in dealing with end-stage renal disease patients and cancer patients. Through the concept of transpersonal caring relationship nurse seeks to recognize, detect and connect the inner condition of the spirit of another through their actions, words, cognition, body language feelings and so on[9&10]. This theory definitely have a great deal of importance in the future because it has a holistic approach to the patient and gives equal importance to the patient as well as for the nurse.

## Conclusion

In this era of globalization, Jean Watson's theory of human caring has a great deal of importance. This theory promotes an interpersonal relationship based on respect, mutual learning, and giving and taking. As this theory gives equal importance to the patient and the nurse, there is a great chance for the nurses to develop. Also, studies have proved the importance of caring model in the nursing practice as well as in nursing education. In nursing education, the theory of human caring involves the study of nurses' life history and previous experiences which will throw lights on the path of the future generation. However, more studies are needed to validate the effective use of Carrative factors.

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