



In 2001, The Valley Hospital (TVH) partnered with The BirchTree Center for Healthcare Transformation (BTC) to explore educational options that would assist TVH in evolving a holistic practice model for nursing care. The Integrative Healing Arts Program (IHAP) was selected for implementation as a pilot program, with the pilot group of 20 nurses completing the training in February 2003 and a second group of 16 nurses graduating in March 2004.

The IHAP used a philosophical and theoretical foundation to prepare nurses for professional holistic nursing practice. Taught in four sessions of 3-4 day modules over 12 months, BTC faculty incorporated caring theory, caring research, spirituality, transformational leadership, nutrition, authentic communication, complementary modalities, and self-care/ self-renewal for the nurse. The certificate program also sought to serve as educational preparation for board certification in holistic nursing.

### Call for Proposals

In February 2003, The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF)/New Jersey Health Initiatives (NJHI) released a call for proposals to address recruitment and retention issues in the state of New Jersey. Using the IHAP as a model, TVH and BTC applied for and received grant funding from RWJF/NJHI to study the effect of a caring practice model on retention of nurses at TVH. The project

was entitled “A Return to Caring and Healing: Enriching the Professional Practice Environment for Registered Nurses.”

For the project, an additional 36 nurses from two in-patient clinical units were selected to attend the IHAP over a one-year period, with the intention of developing a “critical mass” of nurses with the requisite training. In addition, a control unit that had not yet received the IHAP training and two members of the multi-disciplinary team (Director of Physical Therapy and Director of Pastoral Care) were included in the study.

Baseline quantitative data were collected at the beginning of the study (January 2004), and both quantitative data were collected and qualitative focus groups were conducted at midline (after the second session in August 2004). Final data (qualitative and quantitative) were collected at the conclusion of the program (May 2005). Both quantitative and qualitative research indices were utilized to measure the following variables:

- Unit-specific RN turnover rates
- Patient satisfaction scores (Press-Ganey)
- Nursing jobs satisfaction measurements (Nurse Work Index - Revised)
- Perception of caring practices (Peer Group Caring Interaction Scale and the Organizational Climate for Caring Questionnaire)
- Actual experience of nurses related to implementation of the caring model

(via focus groups of class participants and non-participants on study units).

### Holistic Practitioner Role

In addition, as part of the project, a holistic practice nurse position was developed and implemented in June 2004. The person hired for the new position was an early graduate of the IHAP and board certified in holistic nursing (HN-BC) through the American Holistic Nurses Certification Corporation. The holistic practitioner’s responsibilities focused on patients, families, and staff members, including support of staff members on the study units as they moved through the program and strove to implement holistic practice principles. Additional responsibilities included development of policy and procedure protocols related to holistic practices, such as clinical aromatherapy, music therapy, and touch therapies.

### Research Outcome Synopsis

The research outcomes indicated similar results on both in-patient clinical study units: (1) an increase in patient satisfaction scores, (2) an increase in nursing satisfaction, (3) an increase in RN caring perceptions (on the part of both class participants and nonparticipants), and (4) a decrease in RN turnover. In fact, RN turnover on both units dropped to 0% by the conclusion of the study.

Articles detailing the results of this research study have been submitted to professional nursing journals and will be published within the coming year.

# A Research Study to Enrich the Professional Practice Environment for RNs

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We are encouraged that one year after the study's conclusion, both IHAP units continued to have significantly lower turnover rates compared to the control unit and other units in the hospital. This outcome, in and of itself, provided a significant cost savings for TVH and justified further expansion of the IHAP for nurses within the institution.

By developing a coherent research program with clearly defined objectives, TVH and BTC worked together to demonstrate how holistic nursing care benefits patients and hospital facilities. More importantly, the study showed how the IHAP benefited nurses themselves.

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**Marie Shanahan BSN, RN, HN-BC**, is Founder and President/CEO of The BirchTree Center for Holistic Nursing Education in Florence, Mass. She also developed the Renaissance Caring Model, a transformational education and practice model used in clinical settings to facilitate holistic practice, improve patient and provider satisfaction, and develop healing cultures within healthcare organizations.

**Mary Jo Assi MS, RN, APN, C., AHN-BC**, is the Director for Advanced Practice Nursing at The Valley Hospital in Ridgewood, N.J. In her current position, Mary Jo works with multidisciplinary teams on numerous patient-focused quality and safety initiatives and to implement new clinical nursing programs at TVH. She also has oversight responsibility for the Center for Advancement of Holistic Knowledge and Practice and is a certified Clinical Aromatherapist and 'm'-Technique Instructor through RJ Buckle Associates.

Through the Integrative Healing Arts Program, RN turnover on both units dropped to 0% by the conclusion of the study.



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