Easing the pain of PTSD

Clinician Well-being ■ Donations at Work ■ Healthy Nurse
Although the term post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) has only been used for fewer than 40 years, the condition most likely has existed ever since human beings were exposed to extremely traumatic events. Still, patients who are experiencing PTSD symptoms often are reluctant to address them with healthcare professionals, and nurses and other providers can lack the assessment and communications skills to provide them with the help they need.

However, there are a number of powerful resources that can help RNs and student nurses nationwide gain the skills required to assist veterans, military personnel, and others experiencing the disorder.

Nonjudgmental approach

“As a society, and even among health professionals, there is a general discomfort in talking about mental health issues,” said Nancy Hanrahan, PhD, RN, FAAN, a Pennsylvania State Nurses Association member who led a University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing team to create the online PTSD toolkit for nurses. “I wanted to figure out a way of using the huge nursing workforce—who are the most trusted professionals—to recognize PTSD in veterans and others, and to be able to intervene or refer them for treatment.”

The PTSD toolkit, which was developed with support from ANA’s philanthropic arm, the American Nurses Foundation, through a grant from the Jessie Ball DuPont Fund, also helps to expand what PTSD looks like beyond the stereotypes so patients are not overlooked.

“People think there is a great mystery to treating PTSD,” said Teena McGuinness, PhD, CRNP, FAAN, an Alabama State Nurses Association member who has spent most of her career working with people who experienced trauma, and the past 4 years focusing on helping veterans with PTSD. Just like trauma is on a continuum, the interventions used to treat PTSD can range from addressing sleep issues holistically to providing intensive behavioral therapy to medications.

McGuinness and other experts say that addressing PTSD in patients all starts with individualized, patient-centered, nonjudgmental care.

“Treatment works,” added McGuinness, a member of the American Psychiatric Nurses Association (APNA), an organizational affiliate of ANA. “It can change people’s lives.” And she said providers are making headway in addressing PTSD, particularly among veterans.

“There is a big effort [within Veterans Affairs and the nursing profession] to educate vets and their families about PTSD, and to help clinicians build the therapeutic relationship needed to engage veterans in their care,” noted McGuinness, also a co-director of the mental health nurse practitioner residency, a joint program between the Birmingham VA Medical Center and The University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Nursing.

Addressing the numbers

The National Institute of Mental Health describes PTSD as a disorder that develops in people who experienced—directly or indirectly—a shocking, scary, or dangerous event, such as war, sexual assault, abuse, a natural disaster, or the sudden death of a loved one. And it can occur in people of all ages.

“Treatment works. It can change people’s lives.”

— Teena McGuinness, PhD, CRNP, FAAN
Symptoms can include experiencing nightmares, flashbacks, difficulty sleeping, and irritability; avoiding thoughts and feelings about the traumatic event; and losing an interest in enjoyable activities.

“It’s a full-body disorder—with pain, sleep problems, hypervigilance,” said Mary Ann Nihart, MA, APRN, PMHCNS-BC, PMHNP-BC, immediate past president of APNA and associate clinical professor, University of California, San Francisco (UCSF). “Having PTSD is like constantly being on adrenaline— your body is exhausted by overvigilance.”

Further, stigma around mental health issues, particularly in the military, remains an issue, said Paul Sinuk, MSN, PMHNP, who works on the PTSD clinical team at the San Francisco Veteran Affairs Health Care System and is on faculty at UCSF. Active military men and women worry that their duties will be limited, that they won’t be deployed, and they may lose benefits.

“It’s not until they get into the VA [or other healthcare] system that they may begin to disclose symptoms of PTSD, which can lead to treatment,” he said.

Based on the U.S. population, about 7 or 8 out of every 100 persons will experience PTSD in their lives, and 8 million adults have PTSD during a given year, according to the National Center for PTSD. Further, the number of veterans with PTSD varies, depending on where and when they served. An estimated 11% to 20% of veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan have PTSD in a given year. About 30% of Vietnam veterans have had PTSD in their lifetime.

Another cause of PTSD is military sexual trauma, which encompasses sexual harassment and assault. Among veterans who use VA health care, 23% of women reported sexual assault while in the military.

Nurse experts further said that persons with PTSD also may have traumatic brain injuries and substance use disorders, which complicates the clinical picture.

Given the numbers alone, it’s vital that nurses are knowledgeable about what PTSD is, how it presents, and the resources that are available, Sinuk maintained.

Getting started

Experts suggest that nurses must first create an atmosphere in which people feel comfortable to speak, especially during the initial assessment.

“You have to be open and nonjudgmental,” Nihart said.

Because veterans also get care outside the VA system, Hanrahan said one of the first questions nurses should ask any patient during an assessment is whether he or she has ever served in the military.

If they are veterans, McGuinness said that nurses can further engage them by asking more about what their role was and where they served.

“How and where they were deployed has a lot to do with the symptoms they may experience,” she said. “Veterans also can have trauma from childhood, and may have joined the service as a way to start a new life for themselves.”

And while many people who are struggling with PTSD may at least initially be reluctant to talk about traumatic events they were exposed to, clinicians can help ease their symptoms.

“A large percentage of people with PTSD have trouble sleeping, so nurses can talk with them about interventions and resources that can help them address that issue,” Sinuk said. McGuinness added that, when working with patients on interventions, “One size does not fit all.”

Medication and behavior modification therapy are important interventions. “However nurses can suggest little changes that patients can do, such as yoga, reaching out to other veterans, or equine therapy, that can help patients feel better and provide them with a safer place to dwell,” she explained.

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The PTSD Toolkit for Nurses, which was made available as a mobile app in partnership with Lippincott Solutions, not only offers detailed information about PTSD and interventions, but also provides nurses and students with an interactive way to practice their assessment skills through three scenarios. (See PTSD resources.)

“IT’s based on the gamification process,” said Hanrahan, now dean and professor at Northeastern University’s School of Nursing in Boston. The questions that nurses select to ask patients elicit different responses, with certain assessment questions more effective than others in identifying and addressing PTSD.

“Getting the best information into the hands of nurses, especially in innovative ways, directly supports our mission to improve the health of the nation through the power of nursing,” said Foundation Executive Director Kate Judge. “We want nurses to have information about PTSD to better care for patients and families, as well as for themselves. Too many nurses suffer from exposure to trauma.”

Nearly 6,200 app usage sessions have been tracked from January 2016, when it was launched, through December 2016.

Students enrolled in Pamela Minarik’s psychiatric-mental health nursing course are among the toolkit’s users. Minarik, PhD, RN, CNS, FAAN, a professor at Samuel Merritt University in Oakland and an ANA\California, APNA and International Society of Psychiatric-Mental Health Nurses member, became interested in PTSD many years ago when she provided care to an oncology patient anticipating chemotherapy who was not sleeping well.

“After talking with him that night, it became clear that he was feeling helpless, a feeling that was prompted by nightmares due to previously unrecognized and untreated PTSD,” she said. So it’s important that all nurses recognize PTSD no matter where they work.

Minarik said that the toolkit helps her accelerated BSN students learn more effective communication techniques, specifically motivational interviewing that helps open the door for behavior change in patients; the importance of tailoring interventions and keeping them patient-centered; and understanding patients’ readiness for change, among other skills. The most valuable aspect for the students was learning which questions were most effective from the different responses elicited from the “patients.”

Finally, McGuinness and Nihart offered recommendations for nurses: Instill the hope in patients that they will get better. And it’s important for clinicians, especially those working with patients who have PTSD, to take care of themselves, because they likely will experience some level of compassion fatigue.

— Susan Trossman is a writer-editor at ANA.

PTSD resources

Resources related to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) include the following:


< American Psychiatric Nurses Association— www.apna.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageID=4556

> National Center for PTSD—www.ptsd.va.gov
A passion for giving and nurse empowerment

When Teresa L. Anderson, EdD, MSN, RNC-OB, NE-BC, visits the American Nurses Foundation booth at events and conferences, she lights up the room with her contagious smile and positive energy. Anderson stands up for nurse empowerment and research. She is passionate about nurses leading the way forward in health care, and believes that the Foundation makes a difference through Nursing Research Grants and other programs.

Anderson embodies the work ethic and creativity that is a hallmark of nurses, and brings over 35 years of nursing experience to her current consultation practice, including formal academic education, staff development, advanced practice, nursing leadership, and quality performance improvement. She served as the Magnet® project director for a large hospital system for 6 years.

As a former president of the Nebraska Nurses Association, and now as a consultant for ANA-Nursing Knowledge Center, she often travels to represent the ANA Enterprise and help empower nurses around the country. Even while consulting, Anderson finds a creative way to give back; each time she travels, she donates part of the travel expenses to the Foundation. “The extra per diem for food or other things isn’t something I earned, so it should be used in a valuable way,” Anderson says. These donations have made a big impact.

Realizing the importance of recognizing other nurses for their hard work and dedication, Anderson finds ways to increase her giving throughout the year. For example, Anderson has consistently honored two nurses through the Foundation’s Honor a Nurse program at each ANA Enterprise conference she attends. This way, she gets to make donations that pay it forward and recognize her colleagues.

Anderson is innovating health care through her work in Nebraska, across the country, and her continued creative support of the Foundation. With donors as passionate as Anderson, the Foundation is transforming the nation’s health through the power of nursing. Visit www.givetonursing.org to learn more about how nurses and donors who care about nursing can together make an impact that improves health care and our community.

What’s new in OJIN?

Check out the January 2017 issue of OJIN: The Online Journal of Issues in Nursing, with the theme of “Emerging global health concerns: How nurses respond.” Sample topics include:

- nurses’ role in emerging global health issues
- simulating complex community disaster preparedness
- nurses as partners for preventing and controlling mosquito-borne illnesses
- deployment of United States Public Health Service Nurses in global crises.

Visit www.nursingworld.org/ojin for more.

Honor a nurse for National Nurses Week

Recognize the nurses you know for the heroic work they do every day for patients and their families through the Honor a Nurse program during National Nurses Week, May 6-12.

The Honor a Nurse program, created by the American Nurses Foundation, recognizes nurses for their extraordinary contributions in health care. The program enables colleagues, friends, family, and leaders to honor and tell the stories of nurses who make a positive difference in nursing locally or globally. The funds raised by the Honor a Nurse program are used to support nursing research, scholarships, and programs to improve nurses’ lives and the nursing profession.

Sponsored by American Nurses Foundation

For more information and to donate in honor of a nurse, visit givetonursing.org.
Year of the Healthy Nurse
Get ready for National Nurses Week 2017

Each year from May 6-12, National Nurses Week provides an opportunity to celebrate the contributions that nurses make every day to improve the health of their patients. In 2017, to recognize the importance of self-care for nurses, the theme is “Nursing: The Balance of Mind, Body, and Spirit,” which emphasizes ANA’s long-standing commitment to ensuring the health and wellness of nurses in all settings.

Grand challenge to launch

In keeping with the focus, ANA has designated 2017 the “Year of the Healthy Nurse” and the ANA Enterprise will launch the “Healthy Nurse, Healthy Nation™ Grand Challenge” in May. The challenge is a national movement designed to improve the health of the nation’s 3.6 million registered nurses. A Grand Challenge is a socially beneficial goal that addresses a systemic and embedded problem through collaboration and joint leadership.

Registered nurses are on the frontlines of our health delivery system, providing care to millions of people. When nurses are healthy, it ensures the delivery of quality health care to their patients, families and communities.

RN’s ethical responsibility to self-care

Nurses continue to be recognized by the public for upholding high ethical standards. An annual Gallup survey shows that the public has ranked nursing as the top profession for honesty and ethical standards for 15 years straight. Nurses have a critical responsibility to uphold the highest level of quality and standards in their practice, including fostering a healthy lifestyle.

To support nurses in their goals for self-care, nurse leaders can ensure tools and resources are available to achieve a healthy lifestyle.

Learn more about National Nurses Week 2017, related activities, and resources at www.nursingworld.org/NNW.
The ANA Enterprise announced in February that Sage Products, a part of Stryker Medical, is the first corporate sponsor of its Healthy Nurse, Healthy Nation™ (HNHN) Grand Challenge, launching in May 2017.

“Nurses are on the frontlines delivering quality health care 24/7,” said Pamela F. Cipriano, PhD, RN, NEA-BC, FAAN, president of ANA. “While nurses are committed to caring for others, they often struggle to care for themselves, due to long work hours, lack of sleep, and lack of access to healthy food. Sage Products’ sponsorship of Healthy Nurse, Healthy Nation will help educate nurses and connect them with the tools and resources they need. These resources will help nurses get and stay healthy, and protect them from avoidable injuries while caring for patients.”

As the largest group of healthcare professionals, nurses are critical to America’s healthcare system. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, registered nurses have the fourth-highest rate of injuries and illnesses that result in days away from work when compared to all other occupations.

The HNHN Grand Challenge will address this issue by connecting and engaging individual nurses, employers of nurses, state nurses associations, and specialty nurses associations to take action to improve nurses’ health in five key areas: physical activity, rest, nutrition, quality of life, and safety. The ANA Enterprise has developed numerous measures to track results and demonstrate the impact of HNHN on improving health and wellness. Grand challenges are ambitious, socially beneficial goals that successfully address a systemic and embedded problem through collaboration and joint leadership.

“We are honored to further enhance our partnership with the ANA and support the Healthy Nurse Healthy Nation Grand Challenge, with a specific focus on Safe Patient Handling. Nurses are the heart of health care and helping to prevent nursing-related injuries aligns with our mission of making health care better,” said Jeff Gorton, senior director of marketing, Sage Products.

Sage Products’ sponsorship will help highlight the importance of having healthy nurses serving as role models of health for each other, as well as for the patients and communities they serve. ANA Enterprise will continue to engage in discussions with other prospective sponsors.

Learn more at www.healthynursehealthynation.org.
Taking action to promote clinician well-being and combat burnout, depression

In response to alarming evidence of high rates of depression and suicide among U.S. healthcare providers, the National Academy of Medicine (NAM) is launching a wide-ranging action collaborative of multiple organizations to promote clinician well-being and resilience. ANA is among the more than 20 professional and educational organizations that have committed to the NAM-led initiative, which will identify priorities and collective efforts to advance evidence-based solutions and promote multidisciplinary approaches that will reverse the trends in clinician stress and ultimately improve patient care and outcomes.

“Nurses and other team members experience the toll of emotional labor expressed as compassion fatigue, which manifests as stress and lack of joyfulness, among other work-related, physical, and emotional conditions,” said ANA President Pamela F. Cipriano, PhD, RN, NEA-BC, FAAN, who is participating in the group’s work. “External pressures also diminish professionals’ influence, control, and decision-making power, leading to moral distress. It is essential to implement measures that minimize this occupational hazard and restore health and well-being for all caregivers.”

Said National Academy of Medicine President Victor J. Dzau, chair of the initiative, “It’s disturbing that so many clinicians are stressed out and overwhelmed, but even more so when we consider the impact on patients and society. “Addressing this problem will require individual, organizational, and systems-level reform. The NAM is committed to leading this collaborative effort in finding workable solutions that will ultimately benefit us all.”

Clinician burnout has been linked to increased medical errors and patient dissatisfaction, and recent research has shown that declines in the well-being of healthcare professionals cut across all ages, stages, and career paths—from trainees to experienced practitioners.

“Some organizations have begun work to address clinician burnout on their own, but we know that this is a complex problem that no single solution is going to fix,” said co-chair of the initiative, Darrell G. Kirch, president of the Association of American Medical Colleges. “The NAM’s platform will unite stakeholders from across the country and bring a much-needed multifaceted approach to clinician well-being.”

From the Magnet® hospitals study in 1983, which revealed the qualities in organizations that attract and retain nurses, to current evidence embedded in the Magnet Recognition program, nursing has promoted safe, satisfying, healthy, and ethical work environments to avoid the pitfalls that can detract from quality care and quality of life for nurses and care team members, according to Cipriano. This knowledge is key for promoting resilience in today’s stressful healthcare delivery systems. Additional emphasis on stress reduction is part of ANA’s Healthy Nurse Healthy Nation campaign.

ANA also has convened a Moral Resilience Professional Issues Panel, which, in part, will identify current and potential strategies to strengthen moral resilience.

The collaborative began its work in January; public workshops and meetings will be scheduled throughout the year.

Learn more at https://nam.edu/initiatives/clinician-resilience-and-well-being.

Source: National Academy of Medicine