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# Preparing the Nurse Aide I Student for the Workplace: Combating Burnout and Compassion Fatigue

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Preparing the Nurse Aide I Student for the Workplace: Combating Burnout and  
Compassion Fatigue

by

Patrice Staley

A project submitted to the faculty of  
Gardner-Webb University School of Nursing  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
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2020

Submitted by:

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Date

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **Introduction**

The need for quality care through adequate staffing is a major challenge in the healthcare industry (Cherry et al., 2007). Nurse aides are a vital part of our healthcare system, often spending more time with patients than any other member of the healthcare team. However even though they are essential to the profession, nurse aides endure some of the worst physical, emotional, and psychological abuse, while receiving only a fraction of the pay of other healthcare workers.

### **Problem Statement**

As a nurse aide instructor and a registered nurse in the intensive care unit, it seems new nurse aides struggle to adapt to the healthcare field. After speaking with several students that graduated from the same nurse aide training program in rural North Carolina, all of their responses carried the same message: they did not feel they were prepared to take on the incredible amount of work and responsibility the healthcare field presented. Would incorporating an educational module within nurse aide training courses help nurse aide students feel better prepared for the workplace environment and help decrease burnout and compassion fatigue?

### **Significance**

Nursing assistants endure overwhelming patient care loads and significant turnover rates (Brown et al., 2013). These factors often result in poor quality of care and decreased staff morale (McGilton et al., 2014). Nurse aides are given minimal training that often does not go beyond the basics (Mileski et al., 2016). Nurse aides are simply ill-prepared for the challenge of taking on such an enormous amount of work and strain. As



a result, job satisfaction and high turnover rates often occur, inevitably affecting patient care (Brown et.al, 2013). A Nursing Home Nursing Assistants Survey revealed that 37.5% of nurse aide students who trained in a technical or trade school felt they were somewhat or not prepared for current work in nursing homes by assessment of initial training. When asked whether nurse aides would become a nurse aide again, 49.9% stated they would probably or definitely not become one (Centers for Disease Control, 2004). Ten former nurse aides employed in the local community who attended the Nurse Aide I course were asked if they felt school prepared them for the stress of the workplace. All responded with a resounding “no.” Each of them reported they did not feel prepared to handle the stress of a full patient workload.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to develop and implement an education session about burnout and compassion fatigue within a nurse aide course. Students will learn ways to recognize and combat burnout and compassion fatigue. Recognizing and identifying burnout and compassion fatigue early and knowing ways to handle these issues is vital not only to the health of the nurse aide, but also to the organization. Burnout and compassion fatigue can lead to turnover and poor patient outcomes (Dreher et al., 2019).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Betty Neuman’s Systems Model Theory is the theoretical framework utilized for this project. Neuman deals with wellness and wholeness, acknowledging universal stressors exist, and how those stressors influence each individual’s stability level differently (Neuman & Fawcett, 2011). Each individual system is unique in identifying

interrelationship variables. These include physiological, psychological, socio-cultural, developmental, and spiritual variables, which all can be affected from one extreme to the other when an individual is reacting to single or multiple stressors (Neuman & Fawcett, 2011).

The nurse aide's identification, reaction, and recovery from stressors will be emphasized as identifying these factors will be crucial in determining what educational content should be included to help better prepare nurse aides for the workplace.

Neuman's systems model identifies the individual as being in a dynamic, constantly changing environment. Knowledge of how to adapt to an ever-changing environment is crucial in the healthcare field and is a vital part of developing resilience in the demanding field of healthcare (Neuman & Fawcett, 2011).

Neuman's theory describes a line of defense against stressors and how the interrelationship of psychological, physiological, sociocultural, developmental, and spiritual variables helps determine how protected an individual is against possible reaction to stressors. Emphasizing self-care for the nurse aide is critical. According to Newman's theory, response to stressors will improve if self-care is managed through the maintenance of these variables (Neuman & Fawcett, 2011).

Newman addresses prevention interventions as primary, secondary, and tertiary. Primary prevention refers to assessment, identification, and reduction of environmental stressors to prevent reaction. Nurse aides must be informed of how to assess risk of stress, identify stressors, and preventative strategies for potential adverse reactions to stressors (Neuman & Fawcett, 2011). A primary prevention strategy would be to ensure

adequate sleeping hours were maintained. Sleep is identified as a protective factor against stress (Wisetborisut et al., 2014).

Secondary prevention occurs when individuals have reacted to stress and involves prioritizing interventions and treatment of the stress reaction. The nurse aide should view the stressor as temporary while realizing that change is necessary to successfully overcome the problem. Tertiary prevention involves adjusting to the stress and is aimed at building resilience (Turner & Kaylor, 2015). Nurse aides should be equipped with the knowledge to practice tertiary prevention. Tertiary interventions involve decreasing or eliminating stress response, promoting stability, reflection and flexibility to help adapt, prepare, or prevent future occurrences (Turner & Kaylor, 2015). Forming a collaborative relationship between education and practice, focusing on wellness and wholeness, and recognizing each individual reacts to stress in a unique way are the pillars of this project.

### **Definition of Terms**

- **Burnout syndrome:** results from chronic workplace stress that is not successfully managed; characterized by exhaustion, feelings of cynicism, and workplace efficacy (World Health Organization, 2019)
- **Compassion fatigue:** may result from being exposed to ongoing, intense contact with patient interaction and stress, possibly causing lack of responsiveness to needs of patients, and an increase in patient care errors (Dreher et al., 2019).
- **Nurse Aide:** any individual providing nursing or nursing-related services to clients in a skilled nursing facility who is not a licensed health professional and does not volunteer to provide services without pay (North Carolina Division of Health Service Regulation, 2011).

- **Primary prevention:** refers to assessment, identification, and reduction of environmental stressors to prevent reaction (Neuman & Fawcett, 2011).
- **Secondary prevention:** occurs when individuals have reacted to stress and involves prioritizing interventions and treatment of the stress reaction (Neuman & Fawcett, 2011).
- **Stress:** the body's response to physical, mental or emotional pressure; can raise blood pressure, heart rate; may also lead to feelings of frustration, anxiety, anger or depression (National Cancer Institute, 2020)
- **Tertiary prevention:** involves adjusting to the stressful situations (Neuman & Fawcett, 2011).

## **CHAPTER II**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Literature Related to Statement of Purpose**

Nurse aides in comparison to other healthcare workers spend more time with long term care residents. On average they spend 2.4 hours per day compared to less than 1 hour for other healthcare workers (Eaton et al., 2019). Common responsibilities of nurse aides include assisting with activities of daily living, meeting resident's needs, and working with physical and mental health conditions (Trinkoff et al., 2017). Risk of workplace burnout is influenced with "frequency and intensity of social interaction" (Abrahamson et al., 2009). Nurse aides are faced with many challenges in the workplace, putting them at a high risk for burnout syndrome (Juardo et al., 2018). Burnout syndrome can include depression, anxiety, sleep disorders, headaches, and increased risk of respiratory and gastrointestinal infections (Juardo et al., 2018). Ultimately burnout syndrome threatens the health of nurse aides and the quality of care for residents (Cooper et al., 2016).

Many researchers agree compassion fatigue can result from being exposed to ongoing, intense contact with patient interaction and stress (Dreher et al., 2019). Nurse aides are affected by an assortment of stress factors unique to the care giver role. These factors include ethical issues, high emotional burden, demanding schedules and dealing with patient demands (Klein et al., 2020). Compassion fatigue can impact care given by nurse aides, causing a lack of responsiveness to patient needs, increasing patient care errors. As with burnout syndrome, compassion fatigue can cause the workplace to suffer by increased absences and turnover rates (Dreher et al., 2019). Increased turnover rates

are often associated with decreased quality of care along with poor staff morale (McGilton et al., 2014; Mileski et al., 2016). Complicating the issue further, nurse aides have little career mobility and they are among the lowest paid healthcare workers in the industry (Barry et al., 2005; Mileski et al., 2016).

### **Literature Related to Theoretical Framework**

All healthcare providers need self-care skill strategies to maintain a positive quality of life, more emphasis on work-life balance, physical, emotional and spiritual well-being (Dreher et al., 2019). Sullivan et al. (2019) used the Neuman Systems Model as a guiding framework to combat compassion fatigue, ineffective coping, poor resilience against stressors and maladaptive coping behaviors. Self-care and healthy lifestyle resources may include education materials, nutrition support, coping with grief and bereavement and a respite room (Sullivan et al., 2019). The results of these interventions resulted in overall reduced levels of secondary traumatic stress and compassion fatigue (Sullivan et al., 2019).

McAllister and McKinnon (2009) suggested coping strategies are often overlooked in educational programs in the healthcare field, which suggests engagement in pre-licensure educational experience would help strengthen qualities known to increase resilience. Using Neumann's Systems Model Theory, working on self-identification, coping strengths, and becoming aware of workplace challenges prior to being introduced into the healthcare field are important aspects of the education process leading to greater resilience for the nurse aide student (McAllister & McKinnon, 2009).

### **Strengths and Limitations of Literature**

While there has been an abundant amount of research done on resilience and burnout in the healthcare professional, there is limited literature addressing educational interventions with nurse aide students to help combat resilience, burnout, and compassion fatigue prior to entering the workplace. Educational interventions within the literature focused on educational interventions provided within the workplace. These education interventions were performed after the nurse aide was already exposed to the stressors. Providing educational interventions for nurse aides on burnout and compassion fatigue prior to them entering the healthcare workplace is vital and more research is needed in this area.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **Needs Assessment**

#### **Target Population**

The target population for this project included students registered in a Nurse Aide I program. These students are enrolled but have not completed their class and clinical portions of the course. This population does not have any prior nursing or healthcare experience.

#### **Target Setting**

The intervention was implemented in a facility in the western part of North Carolina. This facility is a community college providing a variety of nursing courses. Each semester up to five nurse aide courses are offered. Class size ranges from five to ten students. Each class meets at varies times during the week, to allow students flexibility in choosing a course fitting to their schedule. Classrooms are equipped with the necessary equipment (overhead projectors and laptop computers) to facilitate a learning environment for the students.

#### **Sponsors and Stakeholders**

Stakeholders identified for this project included the healthcare facilities the nursing aide will work in after successful completion of the nurse aide program. Instructors and nurse aide students are key stakeholders in this project. Additional stakeholders include the community and community partners.



## SWOT Analysis

**Figure 1**

*SWOT Analysis*

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Education module is cost effective</li> <li>● Little change to curriculum</li> <li>● No extra classroom or lab time</li> <li>● Education Materials can be administered online</li> <li>● Resources to provide education already present and included in tuition</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Very small classroom sizes, limited amount of student participation</li> <li>● COVID-19 Pandemic, social distancing, interruptions in classroom schedule due to poor control of community viral spread</li> <li>● Uncertainty and anxiety about lack of clinical experience and inability to complete clinical portion of Nurse Aide I program due to current pandemic conditions</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Use the opportunity provided by the absence of clinical hours to provide teach education module</li> <li>● If the curriculum addendum would be accepted by the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCNAR), every Nurse Aide I course in North Carolina would have the opportunity to participate in the education experience</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The current pandemic conditions could worsen once again, putting all classes on hold and making it more difficult to engage students in education module and further delay students obtaining Nurse Aide I certification</li> <li>● The local community college could reject the proposed addendum to the Nurse Aide I curriculum</li> </ul>

### **Available Resources**

In an educational environment many resources are readily available to enable the implementation of an educational intervention. The target setting has educational classrooms equipped with a projector and screen. Resources to supplement learning include laptop computers provided by the organization. Access to an online platform is available if meeting face-to-face is restricted or limited due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Desired and Expected Outcomes**

The expected outcome was for students to gain an understanding of the demands of a nurse aide position. Additionally, students will understand burnout and compassion fatigue. Students will be able to recognize when burnout and compassion fatigue are present and utilize self-care measures to foster resilience in the workplace.

### **Team Members**

The primary investigator was the key team member with the development of the project idea. The project chair was a doctoral prepared nurse practitioner/nurse educator who assisted in the guidance of this project. Additional team members included faculty members teaching the content to nurse aide I students.

### **Cost/Benefit Analysis**

The estimated cost of this project was minimal. Educational material will be incorporated into current teaching modules at no additional cost to students. No additional cost will be incurred by the student or organization for the use of the facility.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **Project Design**

#### **Goal**

The purpose of this project was to develop and implement an education module about burnout and compassion fatigue within a nurse aide course. The goal of the educational module was to help students learn to identify stressors and be able to combat burnout and compassion fatigue prior to being exposed to these elements in the workplace. Students will have learned self-care management skills to utilize once in the workplace.

#### **Objectives**

The objectives for this project include helping students recognize and identify workplace stressors (burnout and compassion fatigue) and learning how to react to workplace stressors. Additionally, students will learn skills to combat and reduce burnout and compassion fatigue. Reducing the occurrence of burnout and compassion fatigue will reduce stress and in turn increase job satisfaction.

#### **Plan and Material Development**

Utilizing the information gathered in the literature review, an educational session was developed. The educational session included delivery of information on burnout and compassion fatigue. The material covered in this educational session includes a self-reflection on stress, identifying current stressors, and healthy stress management techniques currently utilized by the participant. Additional information within the educational module includes information on how to recognize burnout and compassion fatigue, how it affects our health and job satisfaction, and self-care skills.

Students will complete the four-hour educational session prior to entering their clinicals. During the session students will complete activities including a self-reflection on how they handle common everyday stress. Information regarding stress (signs, symptoms, and causes), defining and recognizing workplace stress and self-care management skills will be reviewed (Robinson et al., 2019). Students will be provided with organizational issued laptops to explore links provided within the educational session on self-care and stress management skills. Collaborative interaction is encouraged with demonstration of self-care and stress management skills. Students will complete the educational course prior to entering their clinical rotation. Clinical rotations consist of 36 hours. After completion of the clinical rotation, students will be administered the National Nursing Assistant Survey (NNAS) questionnaire. Data will be reviewed and further recommendations for additional training within the nurse aide training courses will be evaluated.

### **Timeline**

Educational sessions will be delivered at different times to all nurse aide I classes. Students will complete a 4-hour education session within the week prior to the beginning of clinical hours. After completion of 36 hours of clinical, students will complete the NNAS questionnaire prior to graduation. Upon graduation participants will begin utilization of the self-care skills upon entering the workforce.

### **Budget**

Participants will not incur any additional cost for the addition of the educational module. Educational time is embedded into the course; therefore, no additional cost incurred for the organization. Cost for the proposed project is minimal and limited to the

form of printed material.

### **Evaluation Plan**

Students will complete a 4-hour educational session on burnout, compassion fatigue, and self-care prior to the start of their clinical rotation. After students complete their clinical rotation (36 hours), they will be given the National Nursing Assistant Survey (NNAS) questionnaire. The NNAS consist of 20 questions, measuring several variables students would experience within the clinical setting. Participants will utilize a Likert scale (1 to 5) with one being “excellent” and five being “not offered” to rate different variables noted within practice.

Variables include performing resident care skills, dementia care, dealing with problems in the workplace, and dealing with stress (Center for Disease Control, 2004). Data from the NNAS questionnaire will be used to identify areas within the nursing aide training additional education is needed to help students feel better prepared for the workplace.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **Dissemination**

#### **Dissemination Activity**

The findings gathered from the literature review and development of education was shared in a power point presentation with the program director. Due to the current pandemic with COVID-19, the power point presentation was completed virtually. The feedback provided by the program director included the education session had great merit and should be incorporated into curriculum. The program director also believed the educational session could easily be incorporated into another course called “pathways”, a course required for all prospective nurse aide students.

#### **Limitations**

While this project presented many strengths and opportunities, it was also met with limitations and challenges. One limitation in dissemination was the arise of COVID-19. Student’s clinical experiences were stopped, preventing them from hands-on experience and workloads of nurse aide. An additional limitation to dissemination is time constraint. The educational sessions are limited to 4 hours making it impossible to share all information found regarding burnout, compassion fatigue, and self-care techniques.

#### **Implications for Nursing**

The nursing discipline must integrate education on burnout, compassion fatigue, and stress management. Nurse aides have demanding positions and effective self-management skills are necessary in this position. Increased resilience can lead to decreased turnover rates, burnout, and compassion fatigue. These factors result in improved patient care, improved staff morale, and a strong workforce. Financially, the

healthcare industry will benefit greatly from staff that are able to handle stressful situations (Dutton & Kozachik, 2020).

### **Recommendations**

Recommendations for practice include incorporating education on burnout, compassion fatigue, and stress management within nurse aide curriculum. According to Dutton and Kozachik (2020), nursing staff (registered nurses and nurse aide) participated in a stress management program. The program included how stress is viewed, ways of coping with stress, and how to react to stress. Integration of the project yielded positive results (Dutton & Kozachik, 2020). Incorporating educational sessions within curriculum of not only nurse aide students but all healthcare professionals is vital. Having the knowledge base of how to recognize and manage stress and knowing self-management skills prior to entering the workforce is key to help tackle burnout and compassion fatigue among healthcare workers.

### **Conclusion**

Nurse aides have an immensely important job in healthcare. Providing educational sessions to nursing aid students on burn out, compassion fatigue, and self-management is essential within the nursing curriculum. Identifying stress, how to cope with stress, and identifying individual responses to stress are key to help improve workforce satisfaction and improve patient care. Literature concludes when work life skills are included in initial training, nurse aides were significantly more likely to experience job satisfaction (Han et al., 2014). Coogle et al. (2007) reported learning opportunities to attain skills should lead to improved staff morale, empowerment, and increase retention.

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