

HOLY SHIFT

TEN COMPASSION-ENHANCING STRATEGIES IN 15 MINUTES

Compassion is the essence of nursing. It is in your bones. Your DNA. You started the nursing school application process because you wanted to tenderly care for people, to heal your patients, to bear witness to suffering while offering some love and peace, to be with the most vulnerable and give them some grace and dignity along their health journey.

YES YES, YOU ARE ALREADY THERE. YOU HAVE EVERYTHING
YOU NEED TO BE A COMPASSIONATE, LOVING NURSE.

The healthcare system can make it particularly difficult to tap into your compassion, to find it, to remember you have it. Sometimes it feels like the system destroys this compassion. Even before the pandemic, it seemed that many institutions operated in scarcity mode: not enough staff, not enough time or money, too many patients, and waaaaaaaay too much charting to do.

It's important to know that self-care practices will not make systemic inadequacies go away. And no matter how much self-care you do, the job demands alone can lead a nurse to burnout. We do know that self-care practices can enhance your well-being when you are working with humans who are suffering.

IT HELPS TO BE INTENTIONAL ABOUT HOW YOU
SHOW UP FOR THIS DIFFICULT WORK.

I know that some days are simply better than others. Being a human, I am inconsistent and regimented, lazy and strivey, funny and boring, alive and exhausted. I am consistently inconsistent. Compassion can seem elusive on the best of days. In my time as a nurse, I realized (after way too long) that nursing is a profession of the mind, the body, and the spirit (and the Electronic Medical Record). When you tend to all facets, you may experience less reactivity of the mind, more ease in your body, and more fulfillment as a nurse, making it a little easier to harness the compassion that is your birthright.

It's my hope that practicing these simple strategies will create small and subtle shifts on your shift... helping your spirit, body, and mind all feel in alignment with the profound work of nursing.



A HOLY SHIFT

(THIS IS NOT A RELIGIOUS REFERENCE, BUT IT CAN BE IF YOU WANT IT TO BE.)

1

PRE-SHIFT WARM UP (30 SECONDS):

At home while you are getting ready, set your intention for your shift. It can be a global intention, like presence, joy or connection. Or it may be more specific, like connecting with your lonely patient, sitting next to a patient who is suffering, more eye contact with the patient than with the EMR. You get the idea. Nursing can easily turn into a mundane job with too many tasks, too much charting and too many patients. It is up to us to be thoughtful about how we show up. Take a breath and set your intention. My intention for my shift is: _____

2

PLANK (1 MIN)

Do a 1-minute plank and focus on your bad*ss core. This mighty core will carry you through as you hoist patients up to the right position in bed, transfer a patient, or roll a patient. Nursing is an intensely physical job requiring lifting, heaving and ho-ing, and 10,000 steps guaranteed. One minute isn't much, but if you do this three times a week, it's 150 minutes of planking in a year. Drop the mic.

3

DOWNWARD DOG (1 MIN)

Do a 1-minute downward dog. Be aware of your big beautiful brain and thank it. Pedal out your feet. Let the blood rush to your head — you need all the blood flow here you can get. Nursing is an intensely intellectual profession. It is equal parts anatomy, biology, math, critical thinking, sociology, psychology, chemistry, mechanics, pharmacology, and computer science. And kindness. All in one 12-hour time period.

4

EAT & DRINK (PROBS 1 MINUTE 11 SECONDS)

Eat something, anything. Drink 16 oz of water. You may not get a chance to eat, drink, or pee for another 13 hours.

5

MEDITATION (5 MIN)

Sit down and listen to a 5-minute meditation. You know the interruptions and triaging at work are endless: phone calls, call lights, blood pressure tanking in room 17, Joe needs water in room 22, and Debra needs pain medication in room 3. Meditation may not feel immediately helpful, but over time the bits you do every day will have an effect on your ability to maintain calm in a crisis.

6

INTENTION SETTING (20 SECONDS)

When you enter the unit, remember the intention you set. If you already forgot it, don't worry, set a new one. Practice a breath exercise as you are sanitizing your hands. Feel your feet on the ground, breathe in and smell the alcohol in the sanitizer....
Mmmmmmm. Exhale the bullshit. Leave all the family stuff behind, let it goooooooooo. You are here to show up for your patients.

7

PAUSE (60 SECONDS)

When you start to have a divine human moment at work, PAUSE. It can be a moment of fun with a patient, a deep conversation with a family member, a minute of unwind with a coworker, a moment of presence and connection with your patient. These moments are part of what will feed our soul along the way.

8 BLESS & RELEASE (1.5 MIN)

When your shift is over, bless and release your patients. This can be in the car, or as you walk out the threshold of the hospital or clinic. Recall each patient, one by one. If you can remember their name, awesome! But if you can only remember them by room number, that's good too. Bless them, thank them for the meaning they have bestowed upon your life, and release them to the next shift... or let them go to their families... or let them go to whatever life circumstance is theirs to live. Thank them, bless them and let them goooooo.

9

CLEANSE (20 SECONDS)

When you get home or to your next destination, if you can shower, I recommend this. If you cannot, wash your hands with soap and water and visualize the release of the frantic energy of your shift.

10 GROUND (3 MIN)

Lay down on the floor for 3 minutes and breathe. No patients to care for. No family members to reassure. No charting. No running. No phone calls from terrified family members. No call lights. No procedures. No dressing changes. No pump alarms. No nothing. Let your brain rest. Shhhhhh. If emotions start to bubble up, give them a chance to surface. Don't shove them back down. Be curious.

Nursing will shape you. It will stretch beyond your perceived limitations. It will push you to your absolute edges. But it is beyond the edges where our human growth occurs. And lucky you, you are getting paid for this growth, every damn day. You can maintain some control over how it will shape you and what it will mold you into, which is cool, because nurses love control.

If you can show up for your shift with intention, leave with intention, and walk into the other parts of your life with intention... your nursing profession will continue to stretch you every day as you morph into the beautiful human you've been called to be.

