

UNH Nursing Becomes Watson Caring Science Affiliate

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The field of nursing is built upon a strong moral and ethical foundation, with an emphasis on providing and valuing compassionate human care. The University of New Hampshire's [department of nursing](#) has strengthened its commitment to this philosophy by becoming a National Caring Science Academic Affiliate System of the Watson Caring Science Institute (WCSI).

WCSI is an international non-profit organization that advances the philosophies, theories and practices of human caring and caring science. Focusing on research, education, praxis, leadership and legacy, WCSI aims to widen the development and understanding of caring science to advance quality care and foster healing

environments.

"Faculty, staff and students, as well as our communities and patients, will greatly benefit from all that the WCSI affiliation offers to enhance the implementation of caring science in our classrooms and daily lives."

As one of only four higher education Affiliates, the designation recognizes UNH as a pioneering academic institution that is committed to fully incorporating and providing caring science practices to its nursing students and to the community.

"Our approach to caring science has traditionally had a strong focus on what might be considered to be the traditional curative factors of healthcare," says Gene Harkless, associate professor and chair of UNH's department of nursing. "With our renewed commitment to the

caring sciences, we have now strengthened our focus on the essential dimensions of what we call 'curative' factors."

This approach to nursing practice is centered on the subjective healing processes and the life-world of clients and families. Using knowledge from the sciences, humanities and arts, caring science merges the philosophy and theory of human caring with the cure orientation of medicine. This conceptual model, says Harkless, "gives nursing its unique disciplinary, scientific and professional standing, offering a powerful therapeutic lens and skill set."

Jean Watson, the founder of WCSI, has been an influential nurse leader for more than 40 years. Her caring philosophy has been used to guide transformative models of caring and healing practices for large clinical systems including Stanford Health Care, Trinity Health and Cedars Sinai. WCSI now has more than 400 hospital Affiliates throughout the United States, and is growing.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the department of nursing began

to integrate the theory of caring science in its foundational nursing course, at the same time incorporating the notion of self-care



Angela Braswell in the Zen Den at the Health Sciences Simulation Center

among students. “There is no better time for nurses to be able to care for themselves, and each other,” says Harkless. “In order to care for others you have to care for yourself. It’s a philosophy that really resonates across industries.”

To that end, the recently completed Health Sciences Simulation Center features a self-preservation space, which the nursing department has dubbed the “Zen Den.” It’s a private room where faculty and staff can rejuvenate and refresh.

“The Zen Den provides department faculty and staff a healing space to cultivate reflective, self-care practices” says Angela Braswell, clinical assistant professor of nursing at UNH. “It is extremely important for nurses to care for themselves, and this private and quiet space allows us to do that, and model self-care for our students.”

Braswell, along with clinical associate professor of nursing Cathleen Colleran, completed WCSI's Caritas Coach Education Program® which provides participants with the tools and skills to help translate and live-out the theory and philosophy of human caring-healing. Caritas coaches are integral to the infusion of human caring practices into student learning, and serve as faculty coaches for students as well as ambassadors for the theory of caring science.

“Having Caritas coaches in the nursing program further deepens the department of nursing’s commitment to its Affiliate designation,” says Colleran. “Our faculty, staff and students, as well as our communities and patients, will greatly benefit from all that the WCSI affiliation offers to enhance our implementation of caring science in our classrooms and daily lives.”

Beginning this fall, the department of nursing will formally integrate caring science into the nursing curricula and begin sharing caring science concepts across the UNH campus community, as well as offer caring science events and workshops throughout the New England region for academic institutions and clinical practice partners.

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