

The Primacy of Relationships in Public Health Nursing Practice

June 24, 2015
Community Health Nurses of Canada Conference
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Claire Betker RN, MN, PhD(c), CCHN(C)
Student, University of Saskatchewan, College of Nursing

Objectives

- Describe *Critical Caring* theory
- Identify potential use for *Critical Caring* theory
- Report findings of qualitative research project that examined the relevance of *Critical Caring* theory to the practice of expert Public Health Nurses
- Explore and discuss the relevance of *Critical Caring* theory to PHN practice and to meeting the standards of practice
- Explore barriers to relational practice and strategies for overcoming them



Public Health Nursing

- Synthesis or integration of public health science and nursing theory to promote and protect the health of populations (Keller, Strohschein, & Schaffer, 2011)
- Theoretical foundation of CHN practice combines “nursing theory and knowledge (including **social sciences** and **public health science**) with home health and primary health care principles” (Canadian Community Health Nursing Standards of Practice, 2011, p.6)

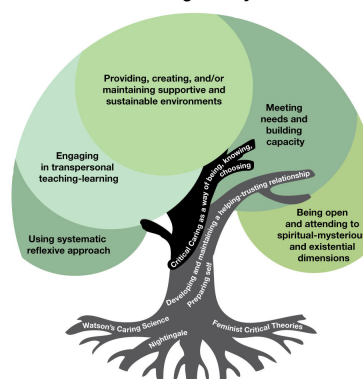
Theory & Public Health Nursing

- Theory assists us to explain what we see and experience; inform our actions and decisions; and articulate possible outcomes
- Provides guidance when evidence to inform decision making is limited
- Lack of theory developed for and from PHN practice

Critical Caring

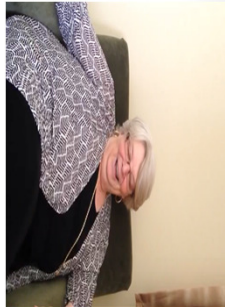
- Proposed as a nursing theory informed by the ethics of caring and social justice (Falk-Rafael, 2005)
- “(A) hybrid, midrange theory that builds on nursing science and critical feminist theories” (Falk-Rafael, 2005, p. 38)
- Grounded in public health nurses’ reflections on their practice and set in a theoretical framework

Critical Caring Theory Model



Potential use of the theory

- Articulate contribution of PHNs - give credibility and visibility to aspects of practice that may be invisible to themselves and others
- Communicate with the public
- Foster inter-professional practice
- Enable ability to practice to Canadian CHN Standards of Practice
- A tool of resistance to develop strategies to overcome barriers to practicing to full scope
- A means to centre PHN practice in nursing's legacy and knowledge to facilitate decisions about their scope of practice



(Dr. Adeline Falk-Rafael, RN, PhD, FAAN June 6, 2014)

Study

Purpose:

To explicate Critical Caring, examine the degree to which it reflected current PHN practice, and modify or expand the theory

Participants:

Phase 1: Theoretical purposive sampling of expert PHNs practicing in 3 different geographical areas of Ontario (2005) – n=10
 Phase 2: Convenience sampling for 2 focus groups (2011) – n=16

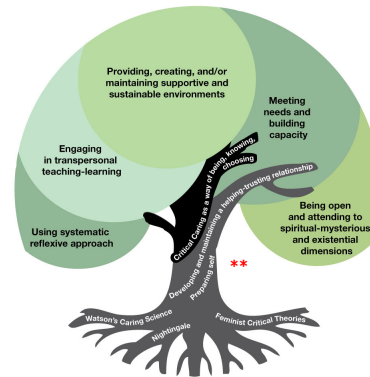
Methodology:

Comparative case study design

Participants

- 26 female PHN participants in interviews & focus groups
- All baccalaureate prepared; ~ ¼ masters prepared
- Experienced PHNs: Mean number of years in practice = 19.3
- Employment: ~ ¾ in public health units/departments; the remainder in Community Health Centres, Rural Health Centres, or unspecified
- Diverse focus of practice

Critical Caring Theory Model



Critical Caring as a Way of Being

- Way of being was "in relationship" – with individuals, families, groups and communities
- Centrality of relationships was stressed – "vital", "fundamental", "critical", "absolutely key"
- "... they're what one develops a matrix with. One builds in all directions on the relationship"
- Essential to effectiveness as a PHN – "the core of what makes our nursing interactions effective"
- Characterized by mutuality, active participation of clients, shared power
- Involves taking cues from clients, attending to meaning, honouring belief systems and client values

There's a woman that I met who was sleeping behind our building . . . Very, very, very mentally unstable . . . but she used to clean up the parking lot with a broom every morning cause about 10 people were sleeping out there. . . . [S]he didn't talk to me for the longest time but I would see her and I would acknowledge her and say hello . . . I knew she wasn't interested in talking to me. . . [T]his went on for many, many months. And I would give her the odd cigarette and say something like, "Thanks a lot for cleaning up the parking lot. That really helps a lot." So we had a little bit of a relationship that wasn't based on much but just daily sight. And then one day she approached me and she said, "So you're some kind of nurse, right?" And I said, "Yes, I am." I thought I was going to get a tirade 'cause I was the enemy. . . But she said, without looking at me still . . . "Give Modicaid injections?"

Critical Caring as a Way of Knowing

(Chinn & Kramer, 2011)

- Aesthetic
 - Understanding the lived experience and situated realities of clients
- Personal
 - Through introspection and reflective practice
- Ethical
 - Realizing a moral imperative to care, including the amelioration of social injustices that erode human dignity
- Emancipatory
 - Critical reflection on upstream contributors to social injustices and concomitant actions to address them
- Empiric
 - Experiential knowledge and evidence informed practice

Emancipatory Knowing

- Advocated for policies to promote health equity
- Fought for policies that would provide equitable opportunities for health, such as food security, housing, and sufficient income; healthy, safe, supportive, and inclusive environments; and accessible transportation
- Described it as an intricate dance of meeting basic needs downstream, either directly or indirectly, through linking people with existing resources and moving upstream to advocate for healthy public policy

"I believe that it's a kind of trombone slide—that it's like the imperative of our discipline."

Critical Caring as a Way of Choosing

- Social justice was an expression of caring
- Relational, contextual caring ethic
 - Informed by principles and underlying values
 - Moral distress and moral agency
 - Bearing witness

"You know, you read about it—the poverty, the homelessness, the abuse. Until I was faced with it, face-to-face, and [saw] how ill and the lack of services that people have . . . I don't think I really realized the impact on health. And so, we continue to advocate where we can on a one-to-one basis and on a collective basis with [specific community agencies] . . . But it's very difficult."

Preparation of Self

- Continuing education and upgrading
 - Formal and informal – especially the development of interpersonal and political advocacy skills
 - Characteristics – multicultural, multiclass milieu, existential thinkers, critical analysis and diversity

"[My program] had no class analysis, race analysis, it was a very white bread, middle class, apolitical environment."

Preparation of Self

- Self-care
 - Physical and psychological health
 - Connect with nature

"I have to fill up myself and a lot of the ways that I fill up myself is with attending to the natural world, whether it's a breeze, a sound of birds, or the colour of the early summer greenery. . . . I think that's how I prepare myself."

- Introspection & reflection
 - Strengths and limitations relative to the situation
 - Comfort with level of sharing self
 - Acknowledging biases, prejudices, belief systems
- Values clarification
 - Openness and cultural sensitivity, safety

Preparation of self

- Spoke of highly influential mentors

But [my mentor] taught me you can hang out and sit and let people talk to you and you listen. And she fortunately said, "That's valuable work." . . . I remember feeling quite nervous about walking into the drop-in centre and what would people think of me and would people not resent me, this white, middle-class woman, coming in here to help them. And she said, "It doesn't matter."

Developing (& Maintaining) a Helping-Trusting Relationship

- Respectful, authentic, non-judgmental
- Recognizing circumstances that may limit a person's ability to enter into a relationship
- Establishing a comfortable environment
 - Leaving enough time, ensuring environment is safe, comfortable, distraction-free
- Finding point of connection
 - Fitting in
 - Sharing of self
- Experiencing a breakthrough

"It might be one person who starts talking about her baby. It might be another one who starts talking about her homeland. It might be [that] you notice something on the person's clothing and make a comment. You never know where those are going to lead to. And it's not engineered. It's genuine and creative."

(Developing &) Maintaining a Helping-Trusting Relationship

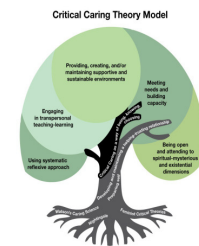
- Respect
 - Non judgemental, affirming, open
- Building trust
 - Being authentic, fully present, listening
 - Following through
- Challenge if focus of practice does not allow for this

"Because of that relationship that we developed, mostly because I listened to her entire story and worked with that, she was empowered to move beyond the simple treatment of her addiction to be an educator around addiction [and women's abuse]—because of that synergy that empowered her basically."

"And . . . the woman from the parking lot . . . I feel like I have a very full relationship with her and the two of us are connected. We're connected. There's no doubt about that. And I treasure that."

Conclusions

- Rich practice accounts explicated the theory and extended it
- Findings support its potential as a framework to guide PHN practice & research
- Grounds PHN in nursing discipline
- Tool for reflective practice
- Use in education of students and novice PHNs



Conclusions

“Critical caring theory has the potential to enable PHNs to articulate and make visible the full disciplinary scope of their practice. As such, Critical caring theory could serve as a tool of resistance to those forces that prevent PHNs from working to their full scope of practice.” (Falk-Rafael & Betker, 2012, p. 331)

References

- Chinn P. L., Kramer M. K. (2011). *Integrated Theory and Knowledge Development in Nursing*. (8th ed.), St. Louis, MO: Elsevier, Mosby
- Community Health Nurses of Canada (2011). *Canadian community health nursing: Professional practice model and standards of practice*. Toronto, ON: Author.
- Falk-Rafael, A. R. (2005b). Advancing nursing theory through theory-guided practice: The emergence of a critical caring perspective. *Advances in Nursing Science*, 28(1), 38-49.
- Falk-Rafael, A. R., & Betker, C. (2012a). Witnessing social injustice downstream and advocating for health equity upstream: “The trombone slide” of nursing. *Advances in Nursing Science*, 35(2), 98-112.
- Falk-Rafael, A. R., & Betker, C. (2012b). The primacy of relationships: A Study of public health nursing practice from a critical caring perspective. *Advances in Nursing Science*, 35, 315-332.
- Keller, L. O., Strohschein, S., & Schaffer, M. A. (2011). Cornerstones of public health nursing. *Public Health Nursing*, 28(3), 249-260.