



PRACTICE MATTERS

From your ANA President



Investing in ourselves

Self-care boosts nurses personally and professionally.

Burnout can impair our resilience and erode our ability to deliver optimal care, making it vital that we give ourselves permission to attend to our own health and well-being, and to look out for coworkers who might be struggling.

NURSES nationwide have performed arduous and impeccable work during the COVID-19 pandemic, now in its 21st month and about to cross into a third year. From intensive care units to skilled nursing facilities, nurses have kept doing what we do best—giving 110% and always being present for our fellow human beings. Nurses thrive on being there to offer competent, compassionate care to our patients, but the pandemic has placed enormous stresses on how well we're there for ourselves.

Many nurses work long, intense hours caring for acutely ill patients without their families by their sides. Nurses also have had to take on more responsibilities or more patients than usual in response to filled units and staffing shortages. In addition, we've been hailed as heroes in our communities while sometimes being assailed (wrongly) for harming patients with vaccines and treatments. Nurses also have experienced the frustration of caring for patients who might have avoided illness, hospitalization, and even death if they had been vaccinated against COVID-19. Moreover, some have worked alongside colleagues skeptical of the evidence surrounding this infectious disease.

The toll of these burdens, personally and professionally, has mounted over time. Across four surveys conducted as part of the American Nurses Foundation's Pulse on the Nation's Nurses COVID-19 Survey Series, growing numbers of nurses have reported feeling overwhelmed, anxious, unable to relax, irritable, and other signs of stress (nursingworld.org/covid-19-survey-series-results). This corrosive burnout can impair our resilience and erode our ability to deliver optimal care, making it vital that we give ourselves permission to attend to our own health and well-being, and to look out for coworkers who might be struggling.

As a starting point, I encourage all nurses to access the array of resources the ANA Enterprise, working with other nurses associations and experienced partners, has developed in response to the pandemic. The Well-Being Initiative—informed by feedback from nurses as well as an

advisory group of subject matter experts—offers resources that consider nurses' differing needs as well as their time and access constraints (nursingworld.org/thewellbeinginitiative). For example, a nurse with just a few minutes for a minibreak could talk with a compassionate listener via the Happy app, whereas someone with more time could participate in a narrative expressive writing program.

During the pandemic, Healthy Nurse, Healthy Nation™ (HNHN) has concentrated on supporting nurses' mental health with tools, activities, and challenges like Decompress: Where's Your Happy Place (hnhn.org). Last year, HNHN launched the Nurse Suicide Prevention & Resilience Resource site, which supports nurses at risk of suicide and those concerned about colleagues who might be at risk (nursingworld.org/practice-policy/nurse-suicide-prevention).

Finally, as part of the ANA Enterprise COVID-19 Resource Center, ANA offers a COVID-19 Video Education Series (nursingworld.org/Covid-19-Videos). This collection of more than 50 videos includes at least 14 that deal with mental health and self-care. From 4 minutes to 60 minutes, these presentations cover topics ranging from methods for assessing one's mental health to surviving the pandemic with an unbroken spirit.

All these resources are freely available, but nurses have to take the first step to access them. Doing so doesn't represent weakness or failure. It's merely an investment in ourselves so that we can deploy our knowledge, skills, and experience to their fullest in providing the highest quality and safest care possible. Taking time to refresh and renew also will benefit our colleagues and the units where we work. Most importantly, self-care enables us to maintain the positive, productive lives we desire and to be there over the long-term for ourselves, our loved ones, and our communities.

Ernest J. Grant, PhD, RN, FAAN
President, American Nurses Association