

ing action. I now understand the importance of nurses' voices in shaping policies that affect our profession, our patients, and our own well-being. By advocating for policies that support self-care and wellness, we can create a healthier work

environment, champion a healthier community, and improve patient outcomes. It is time for nurses to pull up a chair to the table where policies are made or we will miss the opportunity to take action on behalf of ourselves and our patients. ■

Reference:

American Nurses Association. (n.d.) Health Policy. Retrieved 5/26/2025 from <https://www.nursingworld.org/practice-policy/health-policy/>

Beyond Bedside Skills: The Educator's Role in Cultivating a Culture of Self-Care

Contributing Author: Cristin Coleman, MSN, RN, CCRN

Introduction

Nursing is a profession defined by compassion, commitment, and clinical excellence. However, beneath these virtues lies an unspoken culture that often equates self-sacrifice with professional dedication. For generations, nurses have internalized messages that rest is weakness and self-care is optional. These cultural norms, though deeply rooted, are increasingly incompatible with the demands of modern nursing practice. As burnout and compassion fatigue reach critical levels, it is imperative to reframe self-care not as a luxury, but as a professional responsibility essential to both nurse well-being and patient care (Miller & Hutzel-Dunham, 2022; Williams et al., 2022).

The Unsustainable Unspoken Norms

Within nursing culture, a deeply ingrained set of unspoken expectations has shaped how nurses approach their work: Nurses don't stop. Patients always come first. Breaks are optional. Self-care is secondary. These silent rules discourage essential wellness behaviors—such as staying hydrated, taking scheduled breaks, or seeking emotional support after traumatic events.

This mindset fosters a workplace culture where rest is mistaken for weakness, and requesting help is often perceived as a sign of inadequacy. Nurses are frequently praised for picking up additional shifts, pushing through exhaustion, and placing their own needs last. While this dedication may be

well-intentioned, the belief that relentless self-sacrifice equates to professionalism is ultimately unsustainable (Khatatbeh et al., 2022).

The Cost of Self-Neglect

A growing body of research confirms the harmful consequences of self-neglect within the nursing profession. Nurses who consistently overlook their own well-being are significantly more likely to experience burnout, compassion fatigue, and premature exit from the workforce (Khatatbeh et al., 2022).

A 2022 article in *Pain Management Nursing* emphasizes the critical need to promote and sustain self-care behaviors among nurses to preserve personal health and professional satisfaction (Miller & Hutzel-Dunham, 2022). Additionally, findings from Moss et al. (2016) highlight how burnout and moral distress can severely impair clinical judgment and compromise patient outcomes.

Despite this evidence, many healthcare organizations continue to lack formal structures or expectations that prioritize nurse wellness—a missed opportunity to protect both nurses and the patients they serve.

Reframing the Narrative: Self-Care as a Professional Responsibility

Nursing educators and clinical leaders hold a vital role in shaping not only clinical competence but also the professional identity of

the nurses they mentor. Their influence extends beyond procedures and protocols—encompassing how nurses perceive their own value, set boundaries, and develop the mindset for sustainable, long-term practice.

As part of this responsibility, educators must actively teach, model, and reinforce self-care as a non-negotiable aspect of ethical and effective nursing. Self-care is not a luxury or an afterthought—it is a professional responsibility that safeguards the well-being of both nurses and patients.

By embedding the principles of self-care early in a nurse's career—starting in orientation and continuing through ongoing development—educators can challenge the entrenched culture of self-neglect and help establish healthier, more sustainable norms. These principles should be treated with the same seriousness and regularity as clinical skills review.

To support this cultural shift, educators can:

- **Normalize the Language of Wellness:** Introduce and consistently use terms such as psychological safety, professional boundaries, and emotional regulation in clinical education, debriefings, and daily communication. Making these concepts routine helps remove stigma and promotes open dialogue.
- **Incorporate Reflective Practice:** Create opportunities during simulations, post-shift check-ins, and clinical debriefings for nurses to reflect not just on patient care but on their own emotional and

mental well-being. These reflective moments build self-awareness and foster resilience.

- **Highlight the Real-World Impact:** Emphasize that self-care directly affects clinical effectiveness, patient safety, and career longevity. Citing evidence that regulated, well-rested nurses experience fewer errors and communicate more effectively reinforces the value of self-care as a performance enhancer, not a distraction.
- **Mentor by Example:** Educators must also model the behaviors they promote—taking breaks, setting limits, and communicating transparently about stress and self-care. When leaders visibly prioritize their own well-being, they validate others who choose to do the same.
- **Design Self-Care Spaces and Tools:** Create a quiet, calming rooms within the work environment, furnished with recliners, soft lighting, aromatherapy, and mindfulness tools. These spaces provide a break from the demands of clinical care. Educators often partner with leadership and facilities to create and promote these spaces, highlighting them during round- ing or staff orientation.
- **Provide Code Lavender Bins:** Strategically place kits containing stress-relief tools such as fidget items, lavender lotion, handheld massagers, and mindfulness prompts in the work environment. These bins offer quick, accessible coping tools and are maintained by educators as part of broader wellness initiatives.
- **Integrate Fun into the Workday:** Nursing is mentally and emotionally taxing. Small, purposeful opportunities for mental reset and team connection through education games or activities on the unit can make a difference.
- **Deliver Self-Care Giveaways and Themed Events:** Schedule events throughout the year—particularly during Nurse's Week, seasonal transitions, or awareness months. These events provide staff with wellness items such as tea kits, coloring books, and mindfulness tools. Such initiatives send the message that rest and self-care are valued year-round, not only during special occasions.
- **Embed Self-Care in Orientation and Ongoing Education:** The foundation for a healthy practice begins at the start of a nurse's professional journey. Embed- ding wellness education into orientation

ensures new nurses understand that self-care is integral to professional success.

By integrating these strategies into educational frameworks, daily routines, and unit culture, nurse educators help cultivate a professional environment where self-care is not an afterthought—but a necessary and respected part of nursing practice.

Conclusion

The nursing profession stands at a critical juncture. The longstanding culture of self-neglect is no longer tenable in the face of escalating burnout and workforce attrition. By reframing self-care as a professional imperative and implementing practical strategies to support nurse well-being, we can foster a more sustainable, compassionate, and effective healthcare system. It is time to prioritize the caregivers, ensuring that they have the support and resources needed to thrive in their vital roles. ■

References online:
myamericannurse.com/?p=419646

A Day in the Life of Nurse Residents

Contributing Authors: Latoia Eppinger MS, BSN, RN; Nina Hollopeter BS, MN, RN; Andrea Sawyer BSN, RN; Anthony Mendoza BS, BSN, RN; Jeffery DeCrosta BS, MN, RN; Caeli Regan BS, BSN, RN

As Post-Baccalaureate Registered Nurse Residents (PBRNR) employed by the Veterans Administration (VA) Medical Center, we entered this 12-month residency program with no prior registered nurse (RN) experience. During our time in the program, we have been certified in: Advanced Cardiac Life Support (ACLS), Basic Life Support (BLS) Mental Health First Aid, Out of Operating Room Airway Management (OORAM), Lean Six Sigma White Belt, Collaborative Institutional Training

Initiative (CITI), and American Association of Critical Care Nurses (AACN) Essentials of ECG and Dysrhythmia Monitoring (EDM). In addition, we are active participants in shared governance committees such as the nursing leadership council, nursing research council, quality improvement, and patient education, etc. Outside of our work obligations, we are also active members of nursing organizations.

New graduate nurses face various challenges when transitioning to practice, as

noted by National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) (2025). They experience increased stress levels, and the complexity of patients often leads to errors. Approximately one-fourth of new nurses leave during their first year of practice. However, the NCSBN (2025) has reported that organizations incorporating a nurse residency program have lower attrition rates. Our residency allows us to feel fully supported as we embark on our nursing journey and, by learning and improving