

Reflections on Human Flourishing and Nursing

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Human flourishing is mentioned in the new ANA Code of Ethics for Nurses (ANA, 2025). Provision 5 states that “the nurse has moral duties to self as a person of inherent dignity and worth, including an expectation of a safe place to work that fosters flourishing, authenticity of self at work, and self-respect through integrity and professional competence” (p. 18). Human flourishing as described in 5.5 speaks to relationships with patients, colleagues in the workplace, the nursing community, and society-at-large. These relationships are interdependent and reciprocal where everyone is strengthened and flourishes.

Provision 9 purports that “nurses and their professional organizations work to enact and resource practices, policies, and legislation to promote social justice, eliminate health inequities, and facilitate human flourishing” (p. 37). How do we facilitate human flourishing? We do so by asserting our nursing values, stating and showing our commitment to society, advancing a nursing vision of a good and healthy society, challenging structural oppressions, and engaging in political processes. This extends to global efforts as noted in new Provision 10.

Additionally, flourishing is mentioned in Provision 10 suggesting that “nursing, through organizations and associations, participates in the global nursing and health community to promote human and environmental health, well-being, and flourishing” (p. 42). Nursing needs to strengthen forces that foster health and flourishing. Nurses address health with a holistic lens which results in human flourishing, individually and collectively.

Out of curiosity I conducted a review of the literature using EBSCO multiple databases focusing on peer reviewed journals using the words ‘flourishing in nursing.’ The result included a limited number of articles with four applicable to this intent. Perkins and

colleagues (2012) acknowledged that human flourishing is an achievement that reflects a journey encompassing positive outcomes of self-actualization and self-fulfillment but also challenges such as regret, loss, illness, and/or suffering. The competent nurse focuses on the whole person and as such helps people re-integrate their experiences within themselves, creating new opportunities, resulting in human flourishing and fulfillment. This healing relationship between the person and nurse reflects human dignity, compassion, vulnerability, and cultural and ethical diversity. Perkins et al. suggest that nursing education ensure the outcome of human flourishing. Joseph (2025) also focused on nursing education pointing out that faculty as well as students need to not only survive and thrive, but more importantly, flourish. He aligns flourishing with Maslow’s hierarchy of needs noting that flourishing equates to self-transcendence, a top growth need.

Bunkers (2010) points out that vulnerability offers opportunities to flourish, and both can co-exist. In a caring relationship both the patient and nurse are vulnerable. Human flourishing is a verb since it implies action to be vulnerable, embracing it, connecting, and subsequently, flourishing. To flourish you need to connect with others through healthy empathy, compassion, and solidarity. Solidarity is emphasized in Provision 10, specifically 10.4, where nurses become a collective voice for health and well-being through evidence-based and ethically informed care. According to Bunkers, teaching nursing theories that address human vulnerability and flourishing such as Parse’s theory of human becoming and Watson’s theory of caring is important for us to go beyond a task-oriented profession.

Sumner (2013) reminds us that “nurses are human, and their work is relational and communicative” (p. 20). The relational nature

of nursing implies there is reciprocity meaning that the nurse cares for others but needs to be cared for as well. We live and work in a social world, comprised of people and relationships, and therefore, we are vulnerable. Nursing practice is evidence-based, using problem-solving processes or technical rationality, as describe by Sumner (2013), but is socially mediated by this underlying norm of vulnerability. Understanding yourself, as a nurse, is important to flourish and develop caring relationships. This self-awareness influences our moral behaviors. Finally, flourishing can be defined as “thriving, having vigor, being successful, and growing vigorously” (Sumner, 2013, p. 25) but it needs resilience too.

There is a beautiful synergy between human flourishing as addressed in the Code of Ethics for Nurses and the literature that was reviewed. Both speak to the nurse’s self-awareness, competence, commitment to society, and reciprocal nature of relationships. Lim (2025) reminds us that we are duty bound to care for others, therefore we have an obligation to cultivate human flourishing. Finally, ask yourself, are you ready to be vulnerable; become more self-aware; connect with others using empathy, compassion, and solidarity; and subsequently flourish with vigor and success? I certainly hope so. ■

References online:
myamericannurse.com/?p=423848