When I introduce myself to a patient or a new member of our clinical nursing staff, I usually state I have been a nurse for more than 150 years. This always brings a chuckle and elicits a comment that I look well for someone of such advanced age. In reality, I have been a nurse for more than 30 years. Some days it seems to be 150 years but, more often, when I reflect on my years of nursing practice, it seems like only yesterday that I embarked on this amazing journey as a professional nurse. Health care has changed dramatically since 1983 but I have never regretted my decision to enter the profession of nursing. The opportunities for growth have never ceased, even as a seasoned nurse. Why, then, are nurses leaving the profession? An estimated 30%-50% of nurses either change positions or leave the profession within the first 3 years (MacKusick & Minick, 2010). What leads nurses to walk away from a career that has so much potential? Is it one experience or a series of events that lead to a point of no return?

Developing Coping Strategies

The health care environment is stressful and chaotic. Change is the only constant. It is doubtful the rapid pace of change will diminish any time soon and perhaps not at all. We read about moral distress, a predictor of burnout that leads to dissatisfaction. However, greater resilience protects nurses from emotional exhaustion and contributes to personal accomplishment. Resilience is the ability to develop coping strategies to minimize distress (Rushton, Batcheller, Schroeder & Donohue, 2015). How do we as medical-surgical nurses cultivate our resilience and instill it in others? How do we prepare ourselves for successful and lengthy careers in nursing, especially medical-surgical nursing? What strategies do we have to increase our capacity to cope with the realities of health care in 2016 and beyond?

The culture of the nursing unit plays a role in nurses’ perceived levels of stress. Stress can be labeled as good or bad. A positive social climate, characterized by strong managerial support and cohesiveness among the staff, serves as a buffer against the negative effects of stress. Environmental uncertainty, as measured by the number of admissions, discharges, and transfers in the high-acuity area, can result in emotional exhaustion. Nurses must enhance self-awareness of personal sources of tension. Once these sources are identified, strategies for alleviating stressors can be developed.

Developing a Healthy Practice Environment

The Academy of Medical-Surgical Nurses (AMSN) has been a strong advocate of a healthy practice environment (HPE) for many years. In alignment with the strategic plan, the HPE section of the website has a wealth of evidence-based resources to empower the medical-surgical nurse to transform his or her workplace to cope with stress in the environment (https://www.amsn.org/practice-resources/healthy-practice-environment). AMSN members also have shared their success stories there. Read the submissions, “Healthy Practice Environment – its all about you.” We encourage sharing of personal interactions with patients and colleagues so we can all learn from each other. A healthy, productive practice environment allows the nurse to give excellent care to patients while achieving job satisfaction. This will lead in turn to improved patient safety, enhanced recruitment and retention, and positive patient outcomes. Perhaps this is the key to decreasing the percentage of nurses leaving the profession.

In addition to creating an environment where nurses want to work, we as professionals must take care of ourselves. Spiritual well-being reduces emotional exhaustion, and physical well-being is associated with personal accomplishment. Exercise, rest, adequate nutrition, and time with family and friends may seem basic, but these essentials of self-care allow us to cultivate resilience. As we head into the holiday season, which has its own inherent stressors, take care of yourself so you can provide better care for your patients. Incorporate some rest time to do what you enjoy and re-energize your soul. Nursing is hard work; resilience is your secret weapon. If you are a medical-surgical nurse with a high level of resilience, share the secrets of your success with your fellow nurses. Submit your story to be posted on the AMSN website. We must plant these seeds of resilience in ourselves and serve as role models for our colleagues if we are to be successful in our nursing careers for at least 150 years.
REFERENCES