
**MARGARET NEWMAN'S HEALTH AS EXPANDING
CONSCIOUSNESS: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND PRACTICE
IMPLICATIONS FOR MODERN NURSING**

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ABSTRACT

Margaret Newman's Theory of Health as Expanding Consciousness (HEC) offers a transformative framework for understanding health within the discipline of nursing. Newman reconceptualises health as a dynamic process of expanding awareness rather than merely the absence of disease. In this perspective, illness is not viewed as an opposing state to health but as a meaningful expression of an individual's evolving life pattern. The theory is grounded in the principles of unitary human beings and emphasises the inseparability of person and environment. Central to Newman's theory is the concept of pattern recognition, whereby nurses engage in authentic, mutual relationships with patients to facilitate insight into recurring life themes and experiences. Through caring presence and reflective dialogue, the nurse supports individuals in recognising meaning within their health situations, thereby fostering personal growth and transformation. The theory has significant implications for nursing practice, education, and research. It promotes holistic, relationship-centred care and encourages qualitative methodologies to explore lived experiences. By shifting the focus from disease management to consciousness expansion, Newman's framework strengthens nursing's humanistic foundation and underscores the profession's role in facilitating transformative health experiences.

INTRODUCTION

Generally, nursing theories fall under the following categories: grand theories, middle-range theories, and practice-level theories. The grand theories, as the name suggests, provide an

overall conceptual understanding, while middle-range theories address specific issues such as comfort, stress, or coping. The practice-level theories, as the name suggests, emphasise the practice of nursing, focusing on specific interventions.

In the contemporary health care scenario, marked by technological advancements, the importance of nursing theories cannot be underestimated, as they play an important role in the research, educational, and practice fields of nursing care. The importance of nursing theories is also marked by the fact that they provide an opportunity for interdisciplinary practice, as they clearly outline the contribution of nursing practice to the overall health care scenario. In nursing, a grand theory is a comprehensive framework that provides a broad understanding of nursing practice and guides nursing research, education, and practice. These theories often address fundamental questions about the nature of nursing, the nurse-patient relationship, and the promotion of health and well-being. One prominent example of a grand theory in nursing is Margaret Newman's Theory of Health as Expanding Consciousness. The theory focuses on people's health and how they interact with their environment. It uses consciousness to reach a higher level of growth and development.

History of Newman

Margaret A. Newman was a world-renowned nurse theorist who was born on October 10, 1933, in Memphis, Tennessee. She earned her nursing degree at the University of Tennessee Health Science Centre in 1962. She earned her master's degree in medical-surgical nursing in 1964 at the University of California at San Francisco, and her PhD in Nursing Science at New York University in 1972.

Her books related to her theory include "Health as Expanding Consciousness," "A Developing Discipline," and "Transforming Presence: The Difference That Nursing Makes." She served as a professor at the University of Minnesota, on the faculty at UTHSC, as the PhD program director at New York University, and as a civilian consultant to the U.S. Surgeon General for Nursing Research in 1978. She also led the graduate and research in nursing program at Pennsylvania State University. She was named a Living Legend by the American Academy of Nursing. Dr. Newman died in 2018.



Fig 1.1: Margaret A. Newman.

Evolution of Theory

Newman proposed a new concept of health in a dialectical manner, that is, “DISEASE fuses with its opposite, absence of disease, NON-DISEASE, and brings forth a new concept of HEALTH”. She continues, “This synthesised view incorporates disease as a meaningful aspect of health.”

Newman was in her early twenties when she began taking care of her mother, who was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, a degenerative neurological disease that progressively diminishes the movement of all muscles except those of the eyes. Caring for her mother for over 5 years was a transformative process. She learned to live day by day and was fully immersed in the present. She wrote, “I learned that my mother, though physically incapacitated, was a whole person, just like anybody else. I came to know her and to love her in a way I probably never would have taken the time to experience had she not been physically dependent. The 5 years I spent with her before she died were difficult, tiring, and restrictive in some ways, but intense, loving, and expanding in other ways”.

Although her mother's life was confined by the disease, her life was not defined by it. The mother and daughter experienced “wholeness” and “health” together despite having a progressive disease.

Newman was influenced by Martha Rogers, Itzhuk Bentov, David Bohm, Richard Moss, and Arthur Young, and the following views.

- The unity of a human being is open and interacts with its environment. A unitary human being is “pandimensional” and is manifested by “characteristics that are specific to the whole and which cannot be predicted from knowledge of the parts” (Rogers 1970)
- View of consciousness as evolving and being coextensive with its universe supported. (Bentov 1978)

- Understanding reality through the interplay of contradictory forces or ideas (Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel)
- Discussion of implicate and explicate orders supported the idea of health as a pattern of the whole with normal progression towards higher levels of organisation (Bohms 1980)
- Presentation of love as the highest level of consciousness (Moss 1981)
- The importance of insight, pattern recognition, and choice provided the impetus for the interpretation of the concepts of movement, time, and space into a dynamic theory of health (Young 1976)
- The relationship between harmony and disharmony as part of a rhythmic process. (Ilya Prigogine 1986)

Overview of Newman's Theory of Health as Expanding Consciousness

In the early development of the theory, Newman asserted that the phenomena of inquiry for nursing should be parameters of human wholeness and that there were characteristics of people that identified the whole (Newman, 1979). Time, space, and movement were identified by Newman as dimensions of pattern and consciousness and have been synthesised as the theory evolved to include the major concepts of health, consciousness, and patterns of movement and space-time.

According to Newman's theory, no matter how terrible a person's situation is, the person can tune into their self-consciousness and become one with themselves and find greater meaning and opportunity for connectedness with others.

Consciousness = informational capacity of the system.

System = the human being, the interconnectedness of all living organisms

Health and Illness as a unitary process

Health and evolving patterns of consciousness are the same (Persons are identified by their pattern, the pattern of health and disease).

Health

Newman's theory proposes a view of health as a unidirectional, unitary process of development. She acknowledges that Rogers' (1970) Science of Unitary Human Beings was a major influence in the development of the Theory of HEC. In Newman's theory, health is an expansion of consciousness that is defined as the informational capacity of the system and is seen as the ability of the person to interact with the environment. Disease is a meaningful reflection of the whole and, as such, is viewed as a manifestation of health. Disease and

nondisease are not separate entities but are dialectically fused into health as a pattern of the whole. According to Newman, “Health is the pattern of the whole, and wholeness is. One cannot lose it or gain it”. Disruptions in patterns of human beings, such as disease or catastrophic life events, often become catalysts that potentiate the unfolding of life processes that individuals naturally seek, thereby facilitating movement from one pattern of consciousness to another and transformation into order at a higher level or expanded consciousness.

Consciousness

Consciousness is defined in the theory as the informational capacity of the system (human beings) or the system’s ability to interact with the environment. Newman asserts that an understanding of her definition of consciousness is essential to understanding the theory. Consciousness includes not only cognitive and affective awareness but also the “interconnectedness of the entire living system, which includes physiochemical maintenance and growth processes as well as the immune system”. Consciousness is further conceptualised as co-extensive in the universe and as the essence of all creation. Interaction, then, occurs openly, constantly, and instantaneously throughout the entire spectrum of consciousness. The person does not just possess consciousness but is consciousness, as is all matter. The highest level of consciousness is absolute consciousness, which Newman equates with love that “embraces all experience equally and unconditionally”

Movement through levels of consciousness occurs continuously and unidirectionally in stages and does not occur smoothly but rather in response to major disorganisation and disharmony. Newman drew from Prigogine’s (1980) Theory of Dissipative Structures and Young’s (1976) conceptualization of the evolution of human beings to describe the levels of consciousness in her theory and the dynamics of movement from one level to another. Figure 1.2 depicts the parallel between Newman’s theory of expanding consciousness and Young’s stages of human evolution. According to Newman, “We come into being from a state of potential consciousness, are bound in time, find our identity in space, and through movement we learn the ‘law’ of the way things work and make choices that ultimately take us beyond space and time to a state of absolute consciousness”. Within the theory, physical self-development binds one in time and space as one develops and establishes personal territory (stages two and three). Movement provides a way of controlling the personal environment and represents a choice point (stage four). When movement is restricted, as with illness or physical disability, “one becomes aware of personal limitations and the fact that the old rules

don't work anymore" and one experiences the disconnectedness, disorder, and disequilibrium that are precursors to moving to a higher level of consciousness. Transcendence (stage five) or expansion of boundaries of self and awareness of broader life possibilities occurs in response as a new order is established at a higher level. New ways of relating are discovered, and the freedom that comes with transcending old limitations is discovered. The highest levels of consciousness occur at the sixth stage, in which timelessness occurs, and in the seventh stage, which is absolute consciousness.

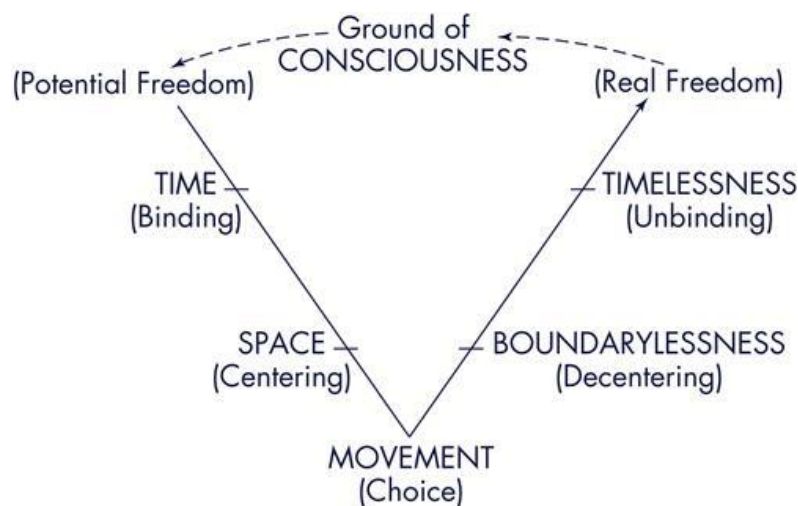


Fig 1.2: Parallel between Newman's Theory of Health as Expanding Consciousness and Young's stages of human evolution.

Margaret Newman wrote many articles describing and refining her theory of Health as Expanding Consciousness. In her article "The Pattern that Connects," she describes the nature and development of nursing knowledge: "Development of nursing knowledge has evolved from an emphasis on parts to focus on the unitary pattern as a whole. Research with the intent of pattern recognition reveals the nature of nursing practice focus on patterns, represents a shift to a higher dimension that includes and transcends previous nursing knowledge".

The Importance of Pattern

Health encompasses disease and non-disease states. When a disease is present, it is a manifestation of the underlying pattern of the person. This pattern is present before the physiological changes of the disease are manifested. "Health is the expansion of consciousness". According to Newman, health and illness are "expressions of the life process", are NOT opposite ends of a spectrum, and are NOT opposite sides of a coin. A

world of opposites is a world of conflict. “At the highest level of consciousness, all opposites are reconciled”.

Metaparadigm (Concepts) of Newman’s Theory of Health as Expanding Consciousness

- **Human Beings:** Dynamic, identified by patterns of consciousness.
- **Environment:** Very abstract and open power and energy systems; manifested patterns; body temp, diet, blood pressure, rest, social, cognition, emotions- anything observable.
- **Health:** Unitary pattern of the whole and includes both health and disease; focus not on treatment/disease but on a higher level of consciousness.
- **Nursing:** NOT DEFINED. Some scholars would consider Newman’s Theory of Expanding Consciousness a conceptual framework, but she does not clearly define the nursing paradigm. However, it is suggested that “Nursing is 'caring in the human health experience” & Nursing is seen as a partnership between the nurse and client, with both growing in the “sense of higher levels of consciousness”

About the Theory & Purpose

- **PARADIGM SHIFT:** from the previous theories consisting of searching for patterns in medical symptoms. Disease is not negative but is used to reach higher levels of consciousness.
- **WHEN NURSING IS NEEDED?** A disruption in the pattern and the patient is at a choice point. Not with a disease/illness/treatment.
- **GOAL OF NURSING:** is not to make people well/better or prevent sickness, but to assist patients to expand or reach a higher level of consciousness

Assumptions of Newman’s Theory

Newman's theory makes six assumptions.

1. Health encompasses conditions heretofore described as illness, or, in medical terms, pathology.
2. These pathological conditions can be considered a manifestation of the total pattern of the individual patient.
3. The pattern of the individual patient that eventually manifests itself as pathology is primary, and exists before structural or functional changes.
4. Removal of the pathology in itself will not change the pattern of the individual patient.

5. If becoming ill is the only way an individual patient's pattern can manifest itself, then that is health for that individual patient.

6. Health is an expansion of consciousness.

Nursing Praxis

What Newman has to say is: -

“If you want to know nursing, you engage in nursing practice.”

“Nursing praxis integrates theory, research, and practice. It is art, science, and practice.”

“A person comes into a higher stage of being known. The nurse becomes the means whereby clients emerge as a transformation of themselves.”

Key works for transformation using Praxis Protocol:

- Fear, shock, surprise
- Depression, helplessness, uncertainty
- Accepting, hoping, praying, dealing, advocating, information seeking
- Letting go, confidence, connecting, trusting, reaching out, blessings, future

Concepts Unique to Health as Expanding Consciousness

1. Phenomenon of Interest
 2. The Interview Transcription
 3. Development of the Narrative: Pattern Recognition
 4. Diagram: Pattern Recognition
 5. Follow-up: Pattern Recognition
 6. Application of the Theory of Health as Expanding Consciousness
- **Phenomenon of Interest:** “The process of expanding consciousness”
 - **The Interview:** The interview process is where the nurse and the client meet via similar patterns and develop trust in each other, where they can expand into a higher level of consciousness. The nurse would then explain what the study is about, and the client agrees to be part of it. The nurse would then ask certain questions about the client, listening and clarifying as the interview goes along. The interview would usually last about an hour and would usually be recorded on tape for future review by the nurse.
 - **Transcription:** The transcription process is part of the praxis protocol, where the nurse reviews the tape recording of the client, noting important life patterns that the client has said.

- **Development of the Narrative: Pattern Recognition:** The nurse then would take all important data about the client's life pattern and put them into chronological order, emphasising the most significant events or people in the client's life. "The data remains the same except in the order of presentation. Natural breaks where a pattern shift occurs are noted and form the basis of sequential patterns"
- **Application of the Theory of Health as Expanding Consciousness:** "The nurse evaluates the nature of the sequential patterns of interaction in terms of quality and complexity, and interprets the patterns according to the study participant/client's position on Young's spectrum of consciousness"

Patient Assessment

- In Newman's view, the responsibility of professional nurses is to establish a primary relationship with the client to identify meaningful patterns and facilitate the client's action potential and decision-making ability.
- The task of nursing is not to try to change the pattern of another person, but to recognise it as information that depicts the whole and relates to it as it unfolds
- As you can see, this theory is not merely concerned with objective data. We need to look at the bigger picture and focus on the patient as a whole.
- By assessing the whole, the nurse can aid in the patient's transformation.

Margaret Newman's Theory in Nursing Research

- Newman continues to research her theory.
- She wrote a book in 2008 called *Transforming Presence: The Difference That Nursing Makes*.
- Researchers are using the Praxis Protocol to better serve their clientele. Nursing Praxis has been used to help people with special needs, mental illness, terminal diagnoses, and so on.

Use of Health as Expanding Consciousness in Clinical Practice

"Emphasis on time in the discipline of nursing has followed the trajectory of moving from physical, linear time to the synchronisation of time in interpersonal relationships to the instantaneous flow of information in each centre of consciousness. It is time to opt for practice that reflects this dimension."

- Health is the major concept of Newman's theory of expanding consciousness. A fusion of disease and non-disease creates a synthesis that is regarded as health
- Newman’s view on health was that health is not something that can be “lost” or “gained” but that it is a reflection of a person's “wholeness”
- Therefore, health and evolving patterns of consciousness are the same. Specifically, health is viewed “as a transformative process to more inclusive consciousness”
- Newman and Gaudiano (1984) focused on the occurrence of depression in the elderly and decreased subjective time
- Mentzer and Schorr (1986) used Newman’s model of duration of time as an index to consciousness in a study of institutionalized elderly.
- Newman states that her research over time assisted not only clients who participated, but she and fellow researchers were also assisted.

Application of Newman’s Theory in Nursing

“Our nursing responsibility is to help patients let go of the artificial boundaries they have imposed on their lives and get in touch with the whole” (Newman, 2003).-Parts of a person’s underlying pattern, that emerge from interaction:- Physical signs and appearances-Mental/cognitive insights-Emotional expressions-Spiritual insights-Nurses must strive for pattern recognition and knowing the patient on a deep level-Nurse –client relationship often begins in times of disruption, uncertainty, and unpredictability-Newman recognizes that nurses are changed by their interactions with patients, just as patients are changed by their interactions with the nurses.

Relationship-centred, transformative care replaces disease-centred therapies in nursing practice when Margaret Newman's Theory of Health as Expanding Consciousness is applied. Nurses promote more profound healing experiences that incorporate the mental, emotional, and spiritual facets of health by placing a strong emphasis on pattern recognition and meaningful interaction.

Case Scenario

Assessment	Nursing Diagnosis	Expected Outcome	Nursing Intervention	Evaluation
Ms X reports fatigue, nausea, and hair loss Feeling overwhelmed,	Anxiety related to uncertainty about the future and the impact of the illness on	Ms X will reduce anxiety and promote emotional	Education and resources to support the patient in making informed decisions about their health and	She communicates with her family and appears relaxed.

anxious,	daily life.	well-being.	well-being. Opportunities for self-reflection, personal growth, and the integration of new insights and perspectives. Therapeutic communication, mindfulness practices, or spiritual counseling. Participate in care and decision-making process	
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Application of Theory in Personal Practice

Margaret A. Newman's theory of Health as Expanding Consciousness suggests that people can achieve a state of health where they connect with their environment. By applying Newman's theory in our personal life, we can cultivate a deeper sense of self-awareness, resilience, and well-being, and embark on a journey of personal growth, transformation, and fulfilment.

Reflections

“I try to maintain awareness of not only how I am affecting my patient, but to also reflect on how all of my patients affect me. This attitude keeps me open to connecting in new situations and to many kinds of people. It helps me to try and focus on the whole person, not just their current condition.” (Julie Kalendek)

“Keeping a positive attitude in the work field, and applying a holistic approach to my field to help patients get through tough moments, making sure they know that I am here for them” (Nattallie Masso)

Research Based on Margaret Newman's Theory

Satoko (2021) emphasised in a study that a “caring partnership” is possible even with nurses' partial involvement during the treatment phase. By applying Newman’s theory, nurses should be consciously involved so that the relationship can be developed, always based on mutual exchange no matter how short the time is.

Jihad et al (2020) applied Newman’s theory to coronary heart disease patients, women with multiple sclerosis or rheumatoid arthritis, and pain during the perioperative period. The theory was effective in all scenarios and provided the nurse with ways to understand patients

from varied backgrounds. This study recommended that it can be applied in every nursing setting in both short and long-term interactions with the patient.

Yamashita (1999), studied caregivers of people with schizophrenia. Discovered themes of struggling alone and “lack of connectedness,” especially from health care providers. Pattern recognition helped them to discover new coping mechanisms. The study reported that feeling a deepened connection with providers and with persons with schizophrenia.

Moch (1990) studied women with breast cancer and focused on their relationships with significant others. Discovered a pattern of “health within illness”.

RESEARCH EXAMPLE:1

Tang, Deng, et al 2023.

HEALTH AS EXPANDING CONSCIOUSNESS

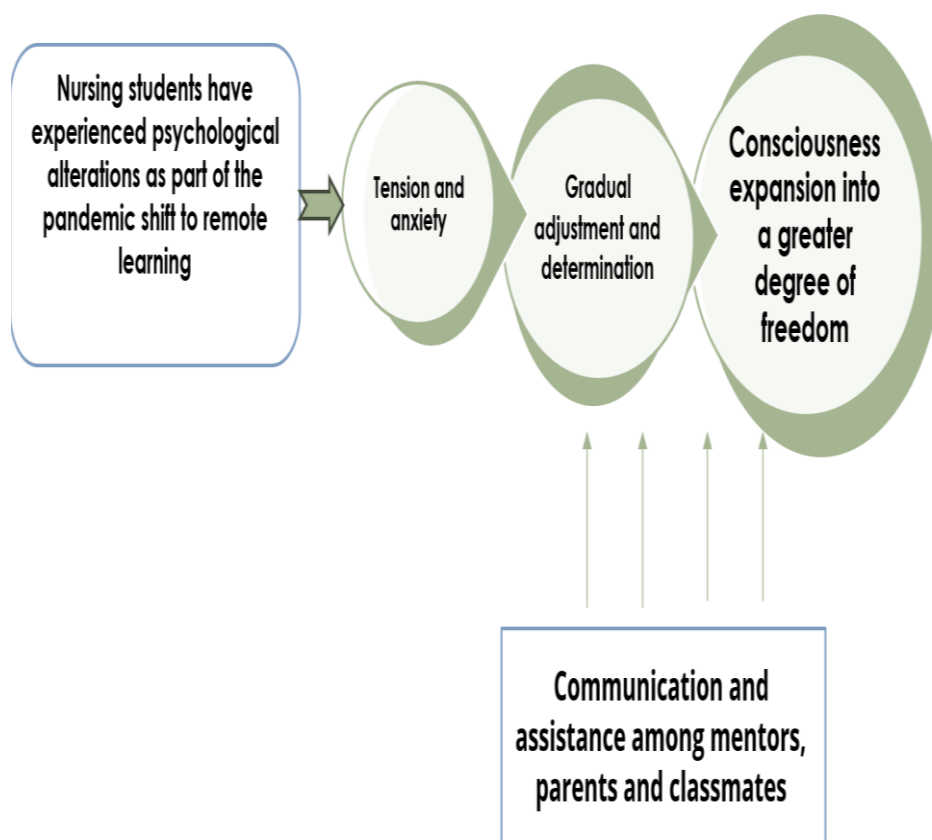
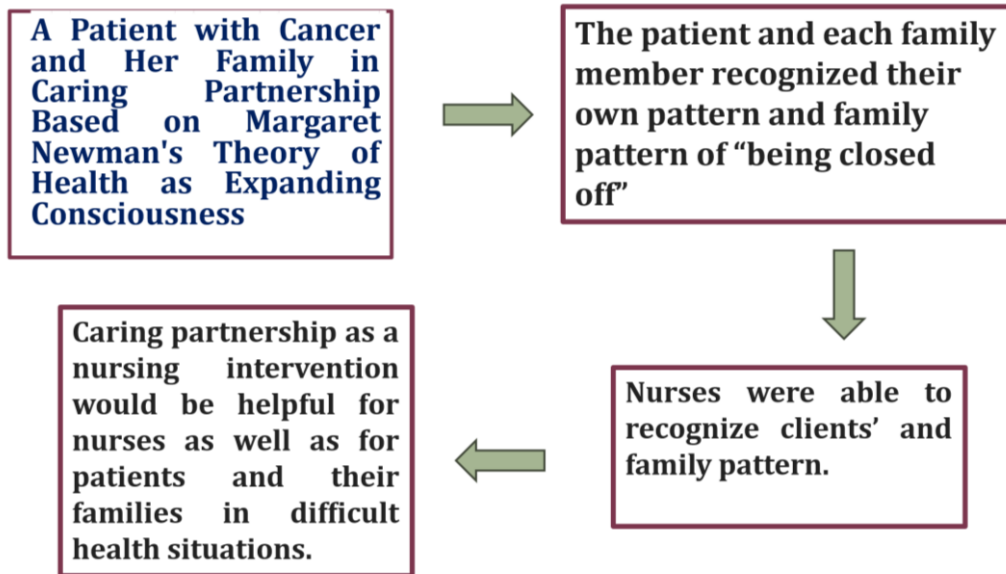


Fig 1.4 Application of Newman theory in research.

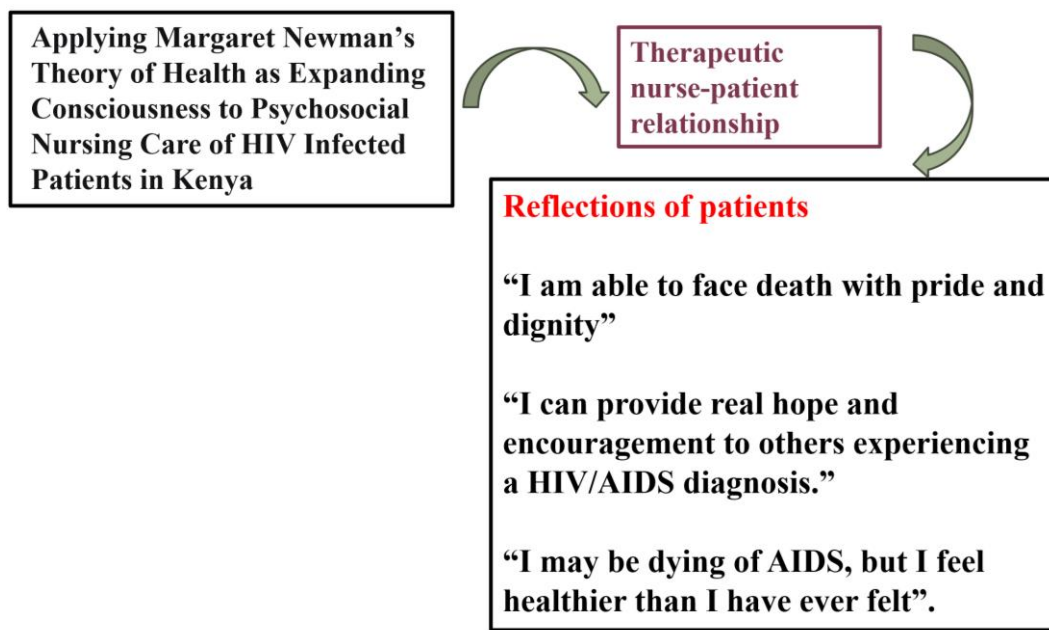
RESEARCH EXAMPLE: 2

Fujiwara, Endo et al, 2017



RESEARCH EXAMPLE :3

Simon, David et al 2015



Use of Newman's theory, Health as Expanding Consciousness in Nursing Education

- Newman's theory should be presented in nursing education to help students identify patterns.
- Her theory in school will help strengthen the teacher-student interaction.
- Teaching her theory will help students view illness and health as a whole.

- This theory will help students to become authentic nurses.
- It will help students to recognise the importance of forming a partnership with their patients.
- This theory will also teach students to look at the big picture, beyond physical symptoms and at the meaning of the patient's situation, because they can make a difference in the lives of their patients.

Health as Expanding Consciousness: Strengths of the Theory

- Health and the evolving pattern of consciousness are the same. The essence of the emerging paradigm of health is the recognition of patterns. Newman (1994) sees the life process as a progression toward higher levels of consciousness.
- Once a person can embrace becoming healthy or being healthy, then they can achieve health. As one begins to see the “bigger” picture of what health consists of and can expand on the idea of health, it will strengthen that person's state of health.
- Can be used in any healthcare setting
- Broad enough for theory development
- Her theory helps with patient-client interactions to give better interventions, understand how the client is feeling, and helps the client to achieve a higher consciousness

Weaknesses or Limitations of Newman's Theory

- The theory is based on an abstract.
- Concepts are challenging to grasp initially.
- Neither long-term research nor quantitative research has been conducted yet using this theory.
- Variables in the theory are difficult to define.
- Seems overwhelming to practice the theory at the bedside due to time constraints.
- The meta paradigm environment is not clearly defined. It is highly important to the theory but is not addressed in terms of what the environment entails.
- Complex- must be able to understand the theory as a whole, not just the concepts
- Multi-dimensional

Evaluation of Newman Theory

- The concepts in Newman's theory are broad in scope because they all relate to health.
- Application of the theory is universal in nature. The broad scope provides a focus for future theory development.

- Newman’s theory changed over time by the process of trial and error.
- Patterns showed that expanding consciousness was related to the quality and connectedness of relationships
- The theory of health as expanding consciousness, along with the research as praxis method, has been used extensively in nursing practice with a variety of individuals, family, and community situations. Nursing education, practice models, and nursing research in the United States and several other countries. Newman continues to write, consult, and lecture, advancing her work.
- “Every person in every situation, no matter how disordered and hopeless it may seem, is part of a process of expanding consciousness,” as Smith and Parker (2015) quote the author’s explanation of her theory. This model inspires hope in patients and helps them to find support in difficult life situations.

Critique of the Theory

- **Clarity** - Semantic clarity is evident in the definitions, descriptions, and dimensions of the concepts of the theory.
- **Simplicity** – The deeper meaning of the theory is complex
- **Generality** – Generalizable; has been applied in several different cultures; applicable across the spectrum of nursing care situations.
- **Empirical Precision** – Aspects of the theory have been operationalised and tested within a traditional scientific mode.
- **Derivable Consequences** –The model would be useful for guiding nursing practice and differentiating nursing’s areas of concern.

Dr. Margaret A Newman Centre for Nursing Theories



Fig 1.4: Inaugurating Dr Margaret A Newman Centre for Nursing Theories.

The Dr Margaret A. Newman Centre for Nursing Theory opened in May 2023. The centre's mission is to promote the development of nursing theory and to generate new theories or expand existing theories with a particular focus on Dr. Newman's theory of Health as Expanding Consciousness. Using a model of scholarship, leadership, innovation, and practice, the Centre provides for direct collaboration with international nurse scholars, practitioners, and students committed to generating knowledge for nursing education, practice, and research.

CONCLUSION

Applying Newman's nursing theory makes it possible to help patients psychologically and give them hope in difficult situations when life circumstances in a new hospital environment worsen morale. The use of the model contributes to expanding the consciousness of those who are desperate and helps to establish trusting relationships. The theory under consideration is particularly relevant in critically ill patients or those in palliative care, where nursing support is important so that patients cannot experience severe anxiety and fall into depressive states.

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