

## NJSNA Region 4 nurses month- week 1 self-care information for our members

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Nurses' Week is not just a time to be celebrated, it is a time to celebrate ourselves, a time to reflect on how we are doing as nurses. With that in mind, what is the biggest and best gift you could get this year for nurses' week? What would make your life as a nurse much better, lastingly better? A massage? Some time alone? A vacation?

All of these things are great, and you should have them, but what would it feel like to have peace of mind at work, to come home feeling tired but fulfilled? What if you could get some lasting relief from the emotional distress that we, as nurses in 2022, are so vulnerable to?

And what if you could give it to yourself?

That would be the ultimate self-care. By mitigating our emotional distress, the other more tangible aspects of self-care would fall into place. Eating right wouldn't be as big a struggle. Restorative sleep would be easier without the racing thoughts. Exercising might even be a possibility.

Feeling that your work is meaningful, feeling engaged, is protective against burnout even when there are huge components outside of your locus of control, like a global pandemic or systemic shortcomings. By feeling like our work is meaningful, one of the root causes of our distress is treated instead of just caring for the sequelae. It's like treating diabetes. We don't prescribe medications for the pain of diabetic neuropathy without addressing blood glucose and A1C. If we could address the etiology of our stress then all the other things, exercise, sleep, and enjoyment of hobbies would fall into place. And just like treating an elevated blood glucose, this is something that we want to make part of our daily routine even if we don't do it perfectly every day.

So how DO you feel good about the work you are doing when staffing ratios are horrible, when everyone around you seems burnt out, when your students are coming out of 2 years of in-home instruction with parents who were ill-equipped for the job? How do you feel good when your long-term care residents are socially isolated and depressed, when you are in management, and you see no way of helping your nurses who are struggling?

How do we feel good when we also feel that we are falling short?

The answer lies in dispelling the erroneous belief that we are falling short. It makes sense that we would believe this, after all, as nurses, we are trained to search for illness, risk, and dysfunction. We look at the whole person and use critical thinking to identify the areas of vulnerability. This is incredibly important for good care of the patient.

Unfortunately, when we apply this approach to our work lives, we can see all the things that AREN'T going right: the odds that are stacked against us, the ways we could have done a better job IF ONLY we had the right resources. This is what generates the belief that we are falling short. We know better so we want to do better.

But this is based in a reality that is not our current one. This is based on the ideal.

So, if we can accept the limitations of "ideal" nursing care and settle for the "best possible" nursing care (in the current situation), we can shift our focus from what isn't working to an equally crucial aspect of nursing: building up strengths, building self-efficacy EVEN WHEN the odds are stacked against us. We incorporate this seamlessly into our patient care even as we address their problems and vulnerabilities. We see the person BEHIND the diagnosis and focus on that person.

Can you see yourself as the person BEHIND the role of the nurse? Can you hold compassion for the person (**YOU**) who is showing up every day, who is trying their best, who is making a difference in someone's life, even without the perfect supplies, time, or energy? Can you focus on this and build on your strengths?

Doing a good job is based on caring for the patient. Period. Whatever that looks like. Can you feel secure in knowing that this means you can ALWAYS do a good job, that focusing on that person behind the diagnosis is ALWAYS an option?

The work you are doing now IS worthy of meaning and fulfillment. If you start with this premise, then every small step you take toward self-care can take root and grow. The best small, but effective, self-care step is to start by holding some space for yourself, being with yourself the way you can "just be" with your patient. Sit in your car for a few minutes before and after work and take 3 deep breaths. Inhale, hold for a few seconds and then exhale for twice as long as the inhale. This engages the parasympathetic nervous system and will allow your body to rest and restore. Just like that.

Let the emotions come and go. Acknowledge that this is hard work, you are doing it, AND you are doing it right. From this place of peace, go to the next step. If you could support yourself in one little way today, if you were your patient, what would you advise her to do?

Start there.

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**If the idea of being happy at work sounds intriguing, or completely out of reach, join us on May 12th for the Nurses' Week Webinar "Reclaiming Your Happiness at Work: 5 Steps for Nurses". You won't want to miss it, take the hour for yourself :)**

**Thursday, May 12**

**7- 8 pm via Zoom**

Please email [nowai.keleekai@gmail.com](mailto:nowai.keleekai@gmail.com) to register and receive the Zoom link.