



Providing Nursing Care Women and Babies Deserve

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The young woman holds the tiny, hours-old newborn's hand and begins to sing "You Are My Sunshine." The baby opens his eyes. The baby's mother isn't the person singing. Instead, the baby's nurse is singing to her small charge in the NICU. Hodges (2014) frames this story of singing during the last minutes of a premature baby's life and seeing his eyes open for the first time as a story of receiving the gift of humility. She was carrying

out the wishes of his mother, who was 2 hours away and recovering from cesarean. Hodges had the courage, compassion, and wisdom to convey to the mother how difficult she thought it must have been to ask for someone else to serenade her baby as he slipped out of this world. The mother's response—that she was singing right along with Hodges from afar—crystallizes what we do as

Abstract *Nursing Care Women and Babies Deserve* describes the core habits of character, also called virtues, that nurses can strive to incorporate into their care of women and newborns. This commentary provides background on the development of *Nursing Care Women and Babies Deserve*, as well as inspiring examples of how nurses incorporate these virtues into their nursing practice. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.nwh.2016.02.002>

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nurses when we engage with women and families in their joys and sorrows, providing compassionate, courageous, and wise care with integrity and humility. These are virtues of caring nursing practice that are lived every day in every place where nurses touch the lives of the patients for whom they care, and for their own families and

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friends. Sometimes we are keenly aware of practicing these virtues, sometimes we aren't, and sometimes we may not make the most of our opportunities to practice in this way.

Background

In the hectic pace of clinical practice, thoughtfulness about the meaning of what nurses do may not rise to the forefront of nurses' daily reflections. The Association of Women's Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses' (AWHONN's) *Nursing Care Women and Babies Deserve* (see Figure 1) was developed to raise women's health, obstetric, and neonatal nurses' consciousness about the significance of their work so that they and others may fully appreciate how what they do matters. AWHONN's core virtues are defined in *Nursing Care Women and Babies Deserve*, and examples of how nurses incorporate these virtues into their nursing practice serve as a guide for nurses to improve their own practice.

The American Nurses Association (ANA) *Code of Ethics* (2015) is the foundation for *Nursing Care Women and Babies Deserve*. AWHONN's core virtues, outlined in *Nursing Care Women and Babies Deserve* and described in this commentary, apply the ANA's *Code* to our specialties and show how nurses demonstrate these core virtues in patient care and in nursing leadership roles.

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AWHONN's Core Virtues

Virtues are habits of character that predispose one to do what is right. A nurse's virtues are revealed in practice as recurring actions that are considered desirable and morally good. Virtues are learned and may be fostered. Virtues are not to be confused with personality traits, which are genetically determined characteristics (ANA, 2015, p. 46). The core virtues described in *Nursing Care Women and Babies Deserve* reflect those core habits of character that AWHONN believes to be essential to providing the optimal, expert, and empathetic family-focused care that women and babies deserve.

How Nurses and Nurse Leaders Demonstrate the Core Virtues

Compassion

A *nurse* who demonstrates compassion engages with empathy and respect for the whole being of others. A *nurse leader* who demonstrates compassion interacts with others with an understanding and an appreciation of the difficulty and complexity of nursing practice.

Courage

A *nurse* who demonstrates moral courage speaks up and asks questions when discussing decisions about care with patients and with health care colleagues. She practices self-reflection about personal, health-related values and beliefs so as to increase the capacity to respect the same in others.

A *nurse leader* who demonstrates moral courage advocates and promotes independent nursing practice, and uses shared reflection about current clinical situations to educate nurses about the provisions of the ANA *Code* and their professional ethical responsibilities.

Engagement

A *nurse* who demonstrates engagement in relationships establishes trust by attending to the patient's experience, and begins with kindness extended as compassion for all, including those for whom it is not "easy" to show compassion.

A *nurse leader* who demonstrates engagement in relationships engages with staff and patients in ways that establish therapeutic relationships, and encourages nurses to share stories about patient care to illustrate and discuss

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