



# Nurse Coaching: Catalyst for Change

by BUDDY ANN ROSS ND, MS, BSN, RN, HNB-BC

W e as holistic nurses excel at patient education—coaching takes patient education one step further. Patients often get overwhelmed and frustrated when healthcare providers give them ultimatums for change. Patients sometimes give up because they can't make too many changes at the same time. The nurse as health and wellness coach, however, can develop a partnership with a patient based on trust, setting goals and mutually agreed upon small action steps. Obstacles, strengths and resources are reviewed. After repeated visits, weekly or monthly, the patient feels supported, cared about and empowered, instead of overwhelmed or berated.

The roles of the nurse coach are many. On the inpatient side, nurses can be trained in holistic modalities to become integrative nurse clinicians, coaching patients through pain and anxiety at the bedside. On the outpatient side, nurses can be trained as lifestyle educators and health/wellness coaches, supporting patients and empowering them to make healthier choices. In the community, nurse coaches might be educators, teaching wellness workshops as part of employee wellness programs in schools and other public settings. The possibilities are endless for nurse coaches as leaders, role models and change agents of wellness.

## A Wellness Model

I came to nurse coaching after serious illness changed my life. I began to explore holistic options, eventually co-founding MetroHealth Medical Center's Integrated Therapies Committee

in Cleveland, Ohio and developing my own holistic consulting practice. Once I began my own practice, I started to search for a “wellness model” or organizational framework to synthesize the elements of wellness. I found that model in the Wellness Inventory, developed by Dr. John Travis in the 1970s (see the Wellness Wheel at right). This wellness model has been adopted by several organizations, including hospitals and universities and was recently featured in the journal, *Military Medicine*. It is currently used for employee wellness at California Pacific Medical Center, and other hospitals across the country. It is also used as a self-care tool for residents in the Program for Integrative Medicine at the University of Arizona and in the new Integrative Nurse Coach training program, [www.integrativenursecoach.com](http://www.integrativenursecoach.com) (J. Strohecker, Health World Online, personal communication, October 28, 2010).

The Wellness Inventory is a comprehensive holistic assessment and life-balance program, designed to help people gain personal insight by focusing on 12 dimensions of wellness (HealthWorld Online & Travis, 2009). It is computer based, and has five components including:

1. Lifestyle assessment, focusing on each individual’s 12 dimensions of wellness. After the client completes a questionnaire, a pie chart or artist’s palette of the client’s body, mind and spirit is created.
2. Scoring, which helps identify the client’s areas of strength and areas in which they are most motivated to make changes.
3. A personal wellness action plan, where the client is guided to create 3-5 simple action steps toward continuous wellness improvement.
4. Tools to support the wellness plan, like e-mail reminders, an online wellness journal, and a virtual wellness resource center.
5. Resources for ongoing wellness and the ability to retake the assessment after six months to monitor progress.

For clients who are not familiar with computers, the Wellness Inventory can be completed with other creative options, such as having clients use colored pencils and color in various dimensions of the wheel as the nurse reads assessment statements to them.

The Wellness Inventory can be utilized in a wide variety of settings. For inpatient education, it can be used as a topic outline to teach stress reduction strategies based on the 12 dimensions.

It could be used for chronic disease self-management programs, to help patients make healthier choices in their day-to-day living. For outpatient education, it could be used to develop community education programs focused on health promotion. For employee wellness, it could be used as a life-balance education tool to help healthcare professionals combat compassion fatigue and burnout. The possibilities are endless.

### Case Study

One day, I overheard two doctors discussing a difficult case. They described a patient (K.T.) with burning mouth syndrome and fibromyalgia who saw 13 different specialists for her symptoms— with no relief. They verbalized frustration because they had nothing else to offer her. I mentioned that I was



searching for patients to practice wellness coaching with as I completed my degree in Traditional Naturopathy. I asked if I could work with her on my own time and off the hospital clock. The doctors agreed. The patient was eager.

After having K.T. complete a holistic assessment form, we proceeded to have six, one-hour sessions together, based on the 12 dimensions of the Wellness Inventory. Immediately we established that her goal was to learn strategies to help her cope with chronic pain. We set small action steps that she felt were possible in her very busy life. As we moved through the various dimensions of wellness, I learned that K.T. needed someone to listen to her. She was frustrated with the conventional medications that did not help her. We started with the dimension of “self-responsibility and love” on the wheel, exploring some of her healthcare beliefs and daily choices. We then rotated clockwise around the wheel, exploring each dimension and considering lifestyle changes when needed. K.T. had many *aha* moments along the wheel as we delved deeply into her current state of health. K.T. became empowered with new tools of wellness. She verbalized new awareness about how her daily choices impacted her health. She reported back to the referring physicians that her chronic pain in her mouth and muscles was 90 percent improved.

This is but one story of healing that can occur when we take time and listen—which is what nurse coaches do. If given an opportunity, position, role, time and space, nurse coaches have potential to greatly impact health and reduce chronic disease in this country. No matter the title, we could transform the health of our country.

### References

- HealthWorld Online & Travis, J.W. (2009). Wellness Inventory. Retrieved on December 29, 2010 from [http://www.wellpeople.com/Healthy\\_Overview.asp](http://www.wellpeople.com/Healthy_Overview.asp).

**Buddy Ross** ND, MS, BSN, RN, HNB-BC is a Board-Certified Holistic Nurse at MetroHealth Medical Center in Cleveland, Ohio. She is the co-founder of the hospital’s Integrated Therapies Committee and co-coordinator of their Hands-to-Heart Reiki Clinic. Buddy is also the president and founder of her own private practice consulting company, Holistic Wellness Buddy LLC. Buddy is a Traditional Naturopath, Certified Wellness Inventory Coach, Reiki Master and Independent Nikken Consultant.