

# Nurse Educators Examine the Applicability of Health as Expanding Consciousness Theory: A Qualitative Review Study

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## Abstract

**Background:** Health as expanding consciousness (HEC) is a grand theory by Margaret Newman, and it is one of those key tools to be used in order to understand a patient as a whole. The theory is based on identifying the pattern of an individual. The HEC focuses on all aspects of the individual as a social, cultural, physical, emotional, and spiritual. It works for understanding the disease as well as other factors pertaining to the pattern of the individual.

**Objective:** The present review study is aimed to provide inside comprehension on the applicability and feasibility of HEC from nurse educator perspectives based on review of qualitative studies.

**Results:** This study shows how successfully the theory was applied to coronary heart disease patients, women with multiple sclerosis or rheumatoid arthritis, and pain during perioperative period. Thus, the theory is effective in all scenarios and provides the nurse ways to understand patients from varied backgrounds. The authors of reviewed studies used the hermeneutic-dialectic approaches as a tool for the research study. The nurses played an important role by help the patients to recognize their pattern and move to a higher level of consciousness. The nurse-patient relationship built on mutual trust and respect, which helped both nurses and clients to interact effectively in order to identify their pattern.

**Conclusion:** Newman's theory can be applied in every nursing setting in both short and long-term interaction with the patient.

**Keywords:** *Health as Expanding Consciousness; Nursing Theory; Qualitative Review.*

## Introduction

Nursing theory is one of the most important subjects that every nurse should know and gain knowledge about. Understanding the nursing theory is a crucial point, and it guides the nurses to apply their knowledge and experience in appropriate ways. Nursing theory is like a roadmap that helps the nurses to move forward and

reach the desired outcome. However, nurses must know the main concepts about how to select a specific nursing theory to draw a broad framework that encompasses all nursing responsibilities. Additionally, it is essential that advance professional nurses use theoretical frameworks in nursing clinical settings, education, and research. In fact, nursing is a comprehensive field that deals with not only health and disease issues, but also with every single phenomenon that somewhat is related and incorporated with environment, individual, family, community, society, as well as global population.

As the patient seeks help and comes to the healthcare provider with not only health issues, but also with other problems. Hence, the Newman's theory focuses on

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health as expanding consciousness in which the person is viewed as a whole. Therefore, this approach is the best way to consider with the patient. This paper is focused on expanding consciousness of the patient and nurse through partnerships in order to find a new way of person-environment interaction in spite of the disease deterrent. Disease is not an enemy to fight against, but is a meaningful point that allows people to find new ways to interact with their environment.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this research article is to illustrate the importance of Newman's theory, which is supported by a research study done on patients with coronary heart disease, a woman with multiple sclerosis (MS) or rheumatoid arthritis (RA), and pain expression in the perioperative period of Somali Women. Newman's theory is based not only on the treatment of the disease, but also on the overall pattern of an individual in different cultures. This theory helps the nurse to expand the consciousness of the patient, simultaneously expanding the nurse's consciousness as well. This in turn supports nurses to improve their knowledge and experience in providing holistic care to an individual. Additionally, Newman's theory can be applied in multi-cultures as well.

**Significance:** People who live with acute or chronic diseases are facing so many difficulties, such as isolation, frustration, hopeless.<sup>1</sup> They feel unable to do something that they would like to do or have done before. Hence, they have lack in interest in life. However, Newman's theory is helping both nurse and client to expand their consciousness. Newman's theory helps patients to find new meaning of life and to interact with the environment by their remaining energy. Patients with multiple sclerosis or rheumatoid arthritis have restricted mobility and have difficulties to interact with their environment. The Newman's theory is a best approach to assist those patients in order to improve their interaction with the environment and implant the hope in their life.

**Overview of the Theory:** Newman's theory Health as Expanding Consciousness (HEC) is one of the most recent nursing theories. This theory focused on the health of all persons regardless of the presence or absence of disease. Health is a major concept of Newman's theory of health as expanding consciousness.<sup>2</sup> Newman (1994) provides a new perspective of health, which is opposite from the old definition of health as the absence of disease, and she explained health is a process encompasses that both disease and non-disease, and disease as a meaningful

manifestation of the pattern of the whole, which is not the separate entity of the whole.<sup>3</sup> In addition, she believes that health and illness are the same entity and manifested in the pattern of the person. Disease and non-disease are each reflections of the larger whole, health is the pattern of the whole, and the wholeness is cannot be gained or lost.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, when the person becomes ill, illness does not diminish wholeness, but wholeness takes on a different form. For example, when a person has certain disease, he or she can get to a healthy place even though that person has a particular disease, because disease is a reorganizing state and part of the wholeness, so the person can find a new situation (pattern) to live and interact with the environment. At the same time, that person is expanding his or her consciousness by changing his or her mind (consciousness) and becoming more aware about how to live and interact with new situation. According to Newman (2008), pattern is seen as information that depicts the whole, and understanding of the meaning of all of the relationships at once.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, health can be identified by the pattern in which one interacts with the larger pattern of the environment and it is manifested in the way one moves, works, speaks, and relates with others. Moreover, when the person gains more information about his or her current situation, the person's pattern develops and the person begins to organize his or her life in high level, by which it becomes more congruent with environment interaction.

Based on Newman's theory, every person exhibits a unique pattern, which is constantly unfolding or open system that interacts with the environment.<sup>6</sup> In addition, Newman describes the nature of the pattern and she states that anything explicate (that which we can hear, see, taste, smell, touch), is a manifestation of the implicate (the unseen underlying pattern). In other words, there is information about the underlying pattern of each individual which we can sense about them, such as their movement, tone of voice, interactions with others, activity level, genetic pattern, vital signs. For example, we can recognize the patient's condition when he or she complains of pain by seeing the patient's facial expression or body posture. There is also information about the patient's underlying pattern in all that the patient tells us about his or her experiences and perceptions of pain. When the patient is providing us the necessary information by describing the pain such as aching, sharp, stabbing, throbbing, or on scale the pain from 1 to 10, or the patient tells us there are

contributing factors that increase pain, such as before or after eating, so all of these are subjective data. Hence, the pattern is just like objective and subjective data. The HEC perspective sees illness, disorder, disruption, and disequilibrium as an explication of the underlying implicate pattern of the person, family, and community.<sup>6</sup> These conditions need reorganization in order to keep balance between individual and environment interaction. Finding a new situation to adapt with is a part of the process of expanding consciousness.

Pattern recognition is one of the essence concepts of Newman's theory. Understanding the pattern is essential. The expanding consciousness is the pattern recognition. When persons face a disruptive situation such as during an illness, they are in a period of chaos. They may be unable to recognize their own pattern. A partnership with a nurse during this period can create an opportunity for reflection on a pattern and a shift in perspective. Nurse-client relationship often begins during a period of disruption, uncertainty, and unpredictability in patient's life. Becoming aware of the pattern of the other person is by becoming "in touch with one's own pattern" nurse should focus on the pattern of other person, acting as the reference beam in a hologram.<sup>4</sup> The nurse needs to be in touch with the patient and focusing on every single detail that interferes with the patient's condition in order to help the patient recognizes his or her own pattern and to clarify that the old rules of pattern are not working anymore, and need to shift into a new way of interaction with the environment. Dr. Newman (1999) referred to this period as a choice point in which the patient most needs nurses during this period, and by a partnership, the patient can recognize his or her pattern and make a decision to shift to a new pattern.<sup>7</sup> This transformation occurs by partnership with the nurse who provides all necessary information and helps the patient to adapt a new pattern, which more coincides with the patient's new condition. The client-nurse relationship becomes more in harmony during this period, both of them is growing by sharing information, experience, and perception, which reflects on expanding consciousness for both of them. We need to remind ourselves as nurses that when we get in touch with the patient it is to focus not only on treating symptoms, but also on identifying the patient's pattern and treating the patient as a whole rather than a part, as Dr. Newman mentioned and called a paradigm shift.<sup>7</sup>

Newman also mentioned the interrelatedness of time, space, and movement. Time and space are the temporal

pattern of the patient, and they have a complementary relationship. People are constantly changing through time and space, and it shows a unique pattern of reality.<sup>4</sup> She also explained that time and space have a complementary relationship. Furthermore, Newman (1986) stated, "Individuals come into being from a state of consciousness, they were bound in time, found their identity in space, and through movement they learned the "law" of the way that things worked and then made choices that ultimately took them beyond space and time to a state of Absolut consciousness".<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, the person with limited mobility has limited space-time. However, transcendence occurs when the patient moves and finds a new meaning for life, which reflects that the patient reaches the higher level of awareness to interact with the environment.

Consciousness and expanding consciousness are also the major concepts of the theory of HEC. Consciousness is defined as both the informational capacity of the system (human being) and the ability of the system to interact with its environment.<sup>4</sup> Also, Dr. Newman (1986) asserts that consciousness not only includes the cognitive and affective awareness, but also the inter connectedness of the entire living system which includes physicochemical maintenance and growth process as well as the immune system. Each system in the human body has specific information and has an ability to interact with environmental system. The environment includes ourselves, our bodies, and the world around us. During the life span, people interact with environment, this interaction between complex information of systems reflecting by gaining experience and knowledge, which in turn these are contributing to expanding consciousness.<sup>4</sup> Life is a process of progression toward a higher level of consciousness. The process of expanding consciousness is defined by Newman (2008) as "a process of becoming more of oneself, of finding greater meaning in life, and reaching new heights of connectedness with other people and the world."<sup>5</sup> Nurses and their clients are gaining knowledge and experience from each other during interaction, and when there is a meaningful quality to their relationships. Nurses and their clients must be open and flexible in order to build mutual respectful and trustful relationships.

Moreover, relationships that are more open, loving, caring, connected, and peaceful are a manifestation of expanding consciousness. Unconditional acceptance is one of the most important issues for the nurse in order to build trustful and respectful relationship with clients.

Nurses must accept the client as he or she is, and whatever his or her health problem. Again, nurses must exhibit professional behavior such as paying attention to every single detail that may be very valuable to the patient. When the nurses are putting themselves in the patient's condition, they can understand and feel the patient's overall situation. Nurses must recognize what are the most important issues to the patient, and why the patient is concerning about these issues. Dealing with patient as a whole is a better approach to treat the patient. By doing so, the patient can realize that the nurse is caring about him or her and will be more open and cooperative to interact with the nurse.

**Relevant Literature to the Theory:** The following research article presented information on life patterns of persons with coronary heart disease by using Newman's theory HEC. The study included eleven clients (7 men and 4 women) in a cardiac rehabilitation program, a cardiovascular nursing specialist, and the investigators.<sup>8</sup> The most important part in this study is pattern, because the main concept of Newman's theory is that the disease is a manifestation of the individual's pattern, and the pattern can be seen in behavior and inner experience of the individual's pattern. The authors conducted this study by interviewing the clients and asked them to describe the most meaningful persons and events in their life. The interviews were audio-taped in order to organize them into chronological order. The nurses were considered as co-researchers and co-interviewers. The nature and purpose of the interview as collaboration between researchers and clients to understand the individual's overall life pattern was explained. The authors found similarities of patterns among these clients who have coronary heart disease (CHD) and classified them under three main themes, which are (a) the need to excel, (b) the need to please others, and (c) the feeling of being alone.<sup>8</sup> All of participants had these themes, but they expressed their thought in different manners. All clients tend to be successful people or they wish to be the best. These feelings were very important to them because their pleasure arose from recognizing of their accomplishments and from being the center of activity and in control. In addition, all of the clients had strong need to please others, but they were in difficult situations to express their feeling at that time. Moreover, they were experiencing loneliness. The feeling of being alone and lack of connectedness to others was the main cause for alcoholism and isolation. These are theoretical similarities of pattern, which reflect the pattern of the

disease. However, the authors described these clients as having poor coping behaviors during the period of disruption (disease), and when the clients reached the choice point they realized that the old ways are not working with new situation (disease) and they need to change their life style.<sup>8</sup> They figured out that the disease crisis was the critical time of re-evaluation of the meaning and direction of their lives. Finally, most of them found things that made their life much easier and have meaningful aspects, such as closer relationships with their families and significant others, quit drinking, and find much more time for entertainment.<sup>8</sup> The role of the nurses was helping the clients to recognize their patterns, and then move forward to the state of absolute consciousness. Our opinion, this is a good research and precisely fits with Newman's theory HEC. The nurses cooperate or deal with the wholeness of the clients rather than treating the symptoms of the disease, and help patients to find new tracks to interact with their environments. The nurses assist the clients, as they are able to do interesting things and interact positively with their environment, rather than they are unable to interact with their environment because of their health problems. The nurses helped the patients to accept that the diseases are only parts of their health.

Neill in 2005 conducted research that supported Newman's theory about seven women living with multiple sclerosis or rheumatoid arthritis, both of which is considered as chronic and autoimmune diseases.<sup>9</sup> In this study, the author used hermeneutic-dialectic process of Newman's theory, which means the communication based on mutual respect and interpretation of content, focusing on meaningful experiences, surrendering control over responses provided, and sharing meanings and insights that evolved<sup>9</sup>, in order to understand patterns of person-environment interaction. The author interviewed clients by using dialogue to pursue the communication with the patients' narratives. The study was conducted through partnerships over 2-year a period. The study allowed the clients to narrate their life-stories, in which the most important people and events they remembered were featured along with their patterns of person-environment interaction<sup>9</sup>. The synopsis of the seven women's stories that there was no movement or change in their patterns of person-environment interaction until they reached the choice point when the women developed new awareness of their situations and progressed to the transcendent stages of expanding consciousness. When the women reached the choice

point, they realized that the old ways of interaction with the environment were not working anymore, and during this time, they need new ways to interact with the environment by changing or re-modeling their life activities. However, the researcher assisted those women by helping them to recognizing their patterns. Then, they worked together and found meaning in living with MS or RA, even though their illnesses were not cured medically. Meaning was evident as new ways of living that restored harmony to their lives. All the seven women spoke of finding simple pleasure, being positive and gaining self-control.<sup>9</sup> New ways of living occurred during the transcendent stage of expanding consciousness, and represented a profound personal change and transformation. All the seven women started to think positively after reaching the choice point, and they began to reconnect with their families, practice simple hobbies, and manage their energy expenditure to avoid fatigue, identifying their limitations, and caring for themselves better than in the past.<sup>9</sup>

Neill (2005) declared that for nurses who interested to use HEC theory to guide their practice, these findings (finding simple pleasure etc.) suggest how best to interact with people who manifest health at different levels of expanding consciousness. Neill (2005) also asserted that nurses could become aware of identifying choice points in illness stories or life stories and might be able to move the patients toward higher level of awareness.<sup>9</sup>

The other research study that supported Newman's theory HEC was about pain expression in the perioperative period: insights from a focus group of Somali women. This study was conducted by Ness in 2009, about Somali women who live in Minnesota. Somali women have different pain expression than other cultures.<sup>10</sup> Nowadays, many nurses understand the importance of the variety of cultures and the impact of these cultures on nursing care process. Hence, caring of individuals from different culture needs more attention and it is a critical situation.<sup>11</sup> Ness (2009) used focus group design in the research study. The group was four Somali women who participated in this study. The researcher explained that pain expression is varying from culture to culture, and nurses need to understand those variations in order to recognize the patient needs. Delivering appropriate nursing care for patients from different culture needs a special attention on the way they express pain. The author used the Newman's theory as a theoretical framework and was focused on pattern recognition, interconnectedness, and wholeness,

which offered an excellent integration for this project. The Newman's theory designates the major role of the nurse as helping others in identifying the power within them to progress to a healthy state.<sup>12</sup> The author used open-ended questions as a way to gain knowledge about their pain experience during perioperative surgery, and to identify patient patterns. Callister (2003) stated that the pain experience should be understood within the context of the beliefs, values, coping mechanisms, and life experiences of each patient.<sup>13</sup> However, the results of the study indicated that Somali women have unique perspectives on the pain experience. The references to Allah and the importance of expression in their native language during the pain experience are very helpful to know when caring for Somali women.<sup>10</sup> The results also showed that the Somali women have pain expressions and behaviors that are universal, which are the similar expressions of most people from different cultures. For example they expressed and described the pain as screaming, moaning, sighing, making a face, eye movements, guarding by holding the site of pain, holding the head in the hands, and movement of the head back and forth.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, those women spoke about their concern after surgery that they were worried about family because they were not able to do daily activities as they were before the surgery. Hence, the researcher provided some resources like social and community support that took care of their children, which were helping them to get better health and eliminate the hardship at that time. These finding will serve to strengthen culturally sensitive nursing practice and provide a positive impact on Somali women experiencing pain within the health care setting.<sup>10</sup> Finally, the women gained more awareness about pain experience while sharing their experience with each other as well as the researcher. The nurses can use the Newman's theory in multi-cultures in order to improve their interaction with patients from different cultures to reach the desired outcome.<sup>10</sup>

**Synthesis of the Theory:** The theory of health as expanding consciousness is a holistic nursing theory, and can be applied in both long and short-term nursing clinical settings. We believe that Newman's theory can be used in every interaction that nurses have with the patient. The following example exhibits how the Newman's theory can be applied in short-term setting in emergency room (ER). The female patient is 42 year old, comes to the ER for treatment of severe dehydration related to nausea and vomiting secondary to her AIDS infection. Based on this case, the nurse would apply the

Newman's theory, while the nurse is introducing her/himself to the patient, the nurse will show the patient that she is highly respected, and she/he will do her/his best to provide a good holistic health care. This is a good approach to show the patient in order to get a mutual respectful relationship. Then, the nurse would say according to the medical record it found that you are dehydrated, and we are going to help you for that, just in order to begin the conversation and discuss how the nurse is going to give her the IV fluid. Moreover, while the nurse is discussing the administration of treatment to her, the nurse would also ask her some other questions, such as how is everything going with you? Alternatively, do you have any other concerns or anything else I can do for you today?

Obviously, the questions will lead to open conversation, and then the nurse can identify or recognize the patient's pattern. During conversation, the nurse realized that the patient is a single mother for three kids and she feels isolated because there is no one around her who can offer a help. In addition, she has a full time job. She is worried about her kids and about her job as well. These are examples about this case, and the patient may demonstrate different situations. However, the key point is that the nurse must know what are the most important people or events to the patient and why. After knowing that, the nurse can work as partnership with the patient in order to assist the patient to recognize his or her pattern. Then, the nurse and patient can move forward to find a new way that would be much better and congruent with the patient's current situation. The nurse would give the patient some resources such as, social support or community support to help her by taking care of her kids and she can return to her job, and spend more time to take care of her health as well.

To sum up, the nurse focused not only on treating the symptoms of the patient, but also tried to recognize her pattern, and identify the most important issues that she was worried about. The nurse treated her as a whole. The nurse helped her to identify her pattern, and both of them are growing and gaining more awareness by finding new way of person-environment interaction.

### Conclusion

In the final analysis, nursing theories have a great emphasis on nursing practice, education, and research. Nursing theories address the most valuable phenomena that improve nurses' knowledge, practice,

and experience. Equally important, nursing theories are useful for individual, family, community, and society. This paper discussed one of the most important nursing theories, which is health as expanding consciousness by Margret A. Newman. This theory focuses on the health as a whole, and the disease as a part of the wholeness. Disease and non-disease manifests individual's pattern. Consciousness includes all the entire living systems in the human body. People during the life span are moving forward to the higher level of consciousness. The environment encompasses human beings and the world around them. Furthermore, the nurse-client relationship is very important part of the Newman's theory. Hence, both of them are gaining knowledge, expanding their consciousness in partnership, and exchanging their information by interacting with each other. Patients with acute or chronic diseases are seeking help and Newman's theory is an idealistic approach to assist these patients. This has been justified by the instances provided in this paper. It shows that this theory is dynamic in practice and can serve a variety of communities.

**Recommendation:** HEC is an excellent theory that can provide a roadmap and be applied in nursing research, clinical settings, and education. It is feasible and we strongly recommend applying this theory in short and long term clinical practice to achieve desired outcomes.

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