
**■ Create your present and future wellness:
A wake-up call and activity challenge**

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As creative nurses you have probably invested considerable time and energy to establish your career. You know it takes significant investments in the *present* to positively impact the *future*. Developing lifelong, healthy activity and exercise habits also requires creativity and effort. This article reminds you of the importance of self-care, sounds a wake-up call, tells my story, and gives you an activity challenge.

Why should self-care for nurses demand your attention?

First, you live with multiple personal, social and environmental stressors that threaten your health at home, at work and in the community/world. About 85 percent of the factors that impact your health are in your control. *Second*, your health values, knowledge and competencies may need reinforcement to be sure they transfer to your self-care practices. *Third*, positive healthy activity outcomes can enhance your functioning in many roles.

Wake-up call

I am a participant in the Women's Health Study (WHS)—a study of about 40,000 health professionals, with 75 percent being registered nurses—at Harvard Medical School and Brigham and Women's Hospital. Do nurses talk the talk and walk the wellness walk? In a conversation with Julie Buring, ScD (personal communication, June 2006), principal investigator of the study, I discovered that women in the study are very similar to the general population in terms of risk factors for cardiovascular disease. Only 11 percent engaged in vigorous exercise four or more times a week. *Fifty-eight percent vigorously exercised less than one time per week*. Similar findings were reported for the Nurses' Health Study of more than 120,000 participants, and Physicians' Health Study of over 22,000 participants. According to Anderson and Smith (2005), American men and women are now faced with heart disease as the top health threat.

As a participant in the WHS for more than a decade, I have been regularly reminded of strengths, risks, health status and health behaviors. Prior to 1997 I was one of the 58 percent who vigorously exercised less than one time per week. Other risk factors were climbing cholesterol and weight fluctuations of 20 pounds.

My 10-year progression to a lifelong activity habit

I have progressed from no vigorous activity to brisk walking or running at least five days a week. Running distances have increased up to six miles, and my next goal is to run a half marathon. I've had lapses, including time off for surgery, but I am back on track. Developing health values and gaining knowledge and competence with the Healthy Action Plan Process (Stephens, 2006) was especially important when I was developing a new healthy activity habit.

First, I gradually came to value physical activity for myself. The health value gave me the desire to change, and motivation and commitment to design and carry out action plans. I developed life principles, and my beliefs, values and actions came into agreement (NANDA, 2003). I *wanted* to promote and protect my health. Physical activities are becoming part of who I am—who I want to be now and in the future.

Second, it was essential for me to gain more knowledge and competence with intentional or planned change as it specifically applied to physical activities. While I am proficient in applying the process to other health areas, I needed to increase skill in this area. I use the Healthy Action Plan Process. It is based on professional standards—the nursing process. I chose physical activities on purpose, with a plan in mind and for a purpose—positive health outcomes (Stephens, 2006, p.99).

My Positive Health Outcomes:

- Increased flexibility, strength and endurance
- Lowered cholesterol, blood pressure and pulse rate
- Weight loss
- Improved self-image, confidence
- Think more clearly, enjoy life more
- Fun family activities—ribbons, medals and trophies from competitive events
- Husband said, “I saw the biggest change in you when you started running.”

This year, in celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, I am a participant in the “Get America Moving” campaign. I accepted the president's challenge and registered in the individual category at www.presidentschallenge.org. Group registration is also an option. Diverse physical activities are recorded by date, intensity and time, and points earned for various awards. The US Department of Health and Human Services recognizes the significance of physical activities in their “Steps to a Healthier US” initiative at www.cdc.gov/steps and www.healthierus.gov, with spotlight links to the president's challenge.

Dr. Jan's Activity Challenge

Remember there is a nursing advantage when designing healthy action plans. Precise plans can be designed, implemented and evaluated using nursing process standards in conjunction with intentional change theory. Whether you are a beginning, intermediate or advanced lifestyle changer, I challenge you to create your present and future wellness. Begin, maintain or enhance your physical activities. Join me in the “Get America Moving” campaign and president's challenge!

Give yourself a gift!

Create your preferred health future by investing in your present!

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