

Nursing the Organizational Energy System: *The Time Has Come*

by JALMA MARCUS
RN, BS, MS, HNB-BC, CBP, AT, CLSE

Nursing – and especially Holistic Nursing – is poised to extend its reach. I see a future where nurses play a vital role in changing healthcare delivery systems and in so doing affect the opportunity for health to emerge at a higher level for many at the same time. But first, it is necessary to develop language that captures our holistic understanding of a single, whole, inseparable, organizational energy system. I call this energy system the *Space that Surrounds*™.

Currently, our language equips us to reference “person” and “environment” as two different concepts, emphasizing that while distinct, they are not separate (Rogers, 1970). “Person” and “environment” have been considered “energy fields” that can now be labeled and understood as one inseparable, more complex informational energy system manifested only in relation to each other (Rovelli, 2014). As we expand the present terms, and create one label incorporating both concepts, we increase opportunities to influence more than one recipient of care at a time. That expansion begins by recognizing and respecting an additional agent: the *healthcare organization* itself, a unique energy system that can be assessed, treated, and nursed (Marcus, 1977, p. 8).

Once we shift our language and perspective, we open opportunities for a higher level of health to emerge – in patients, nurses, staff, and the workplace as a whole with global ripple effects.

ORGANIZATIONS AS AGENT

Language that recognizes the organization as agent is not new. Consider: *This place seems to have a life of its own*. We humanize organizational values with emotive words, such as *trustworthy*, *honest*, and *authentic*. This language creates communication touchpoints and solidifies the organization as its own complex agent composed of other agents (people, processes, structures, relationships, beliefs, emotions, objects), creating energy systems within systems. As we recognize this agent as a complex

adaptive energy system, we empower it – and ourselves – to work in tandem toward health and organizational alignment (Olson & Eoyang, 2001).

Governments already recognize organizations as agents, attributing rights and responsibilities to them. Organizations can own property, earn money, and pay taxes. They cast influence and are themselves influenced by people, countries, market conditions, and competition. Like people, organizations impact and are impacted by beliefs, processes, thoughts, structures, relationships, and human emotions. Organizations, like people, experience loss of spirit, emotional upheavals, and physical breakdowns.

Importantly, organizations can experience stress. In individuals, stress is a major contributor to disease. When a person is frightened and anxious, important internal systems and parts break down, become inefficient, or stop working completely. Biochemicals are released that cause confusion and indecision. Digestion stops and blood rushes to prepare a response of fight, flight, or freeze. Likewise, organizational fear and anxiety can digress to chaos and produce a myriad of symptoms of misalignment: absenteeism, accidents, mistakes, cash flow disturbances, revenue losses, resignations, and the inability to realize goals and achieve outcomes. Constant stress disrupts the flow of necessary information between the parts, creating hypo or hyper functioning of the system. This can result in instability and unhealthy outcomes such as miscommunication, lack of collaborative teamwork, ignoring problems, and within a nursing framework, missed nursing care, burnout, or compassion fatigue (Lake et al., 2017; McElligott, 2013). Over time, the parts can stop communicating altogether, contributing to low patient-satisfaction scores and low staff retention.

The typical response to misalignment is to call a specialist to address the symptoms: accountants, financial analysts, process-improvement consultants, and leadership coaches. As with human health, symptomatic focus usually results in more imbalance.

“Sometimes the symptoms are gross and immediate, but frequently they are subtle and evolve” (Marcus, 1977, p. 8). A part of the organization may improve (e.g., the people, processes, structure, relationships), but the organization itself does not heal. Without addressing root causes, the solution is nothing more than a band-aid, a stopgap that depletes time, money, and individual spirit.

The good news is that because organizational energy systems are composed of people, they are resilient with the ability to self-organize, adapt, and heal. Organizations are designed with parts that innately communicate in complex and unique ways to promote flexibility, adaptability, and balance through alignment and shared intent. As with the health of an individual, optimal organizational health is accomplished when the parts work together as one interrelated and integrative system. This creates organizational energy that is receptive to growth, stability, and learning.

THE ORGANIZATION AS ENERGY

Quantum physics holds that everything in the universe, all matter, is energy that has the potential to transform and make change occur. The concept of space is no longer understood as a field of finite lines, but rather as a web network. This network is a unique system of energetic parts knit together by the interaction of energy quanta, parts, relationships, and processes. The ceaseless swarming, constricting, and contracting of relationships creates the web fabric defined as “space” (Rovelli, 2014).

The theoretical physicist Carlo Rovelli (2014) expands and redefines Faraday’s theory, indicating that lines are not *in* a place but rather *create* places through their interactions (p. 174). Through a holistic lens, we can view that created space as its own agent, and in doing so, we can study, observe, care for, and become familiar with how it acts and is acted upon.

When we embrace this understanding, we can see the healthcare organization from a different perspective – an energetic space composed of a complex web of systems. We can see the whole system as a co-creator in healing, a colleague that deserves respect, support, and care.

THE SPACE THAT SURROUNDS™

The human body is a resilient, strong, energy web able to heal itself. Though one body, it has many parts and systems that work together as one unit. Each part is unique in physiology and function. Some are conspicuous with obvious roles. Others are more subtle and microscopic or unseen. Some help maintain homeostasis, while others signal positive feedback loops of change. Although different in size, shape, and nature, each part is integrally networked and “plugged in” to the system(s). All parts combine to build the whole body, and the whole body is built by each individual part.

Take this same image and think of a healthcare organization. Envision a complex, adaptive energy system that continuously self-organizes to the introduction of new energy systems: people, relationships, thoughts, beliefs, emotions, biochemistry,

cognitive thinking, physiological changes, objects, processes, and structures. This is what I call the “space that surrounds,” the web network of an organization – it is adaptable, flexible, and resilient. From a holistic perspective, we can think of this web network as an interwoven, complex, connected, and dynamic energy system composed of smaller energy systems (other agents). These systems influence the behavior and pattern of the energetic space by constantly interacting and sharing information with each other.

continued on page 20

Underlying Assumptions of the Space That Surrounds™

The guiding principles underlying this framework are as follows:

1. Organizations are made up of many parts that innately communicate in complex and unique ways. The organization acts as its own agent, composed of other agents (e.g. people, processes, structures, relationships, beliefs, emotions, objects).
2. Organizations are complex adaptive energy systems.
3. Organizations continuously self-organize to the introduction of smaller energy systems (other agents) that are interacting and reacting to each other – a web network of systems.
4. The web network of an organization is the energetic “space that surrounds” – a single, whole, inseparable, organizational energy web system made up of many parts.
5. The organizational *space that surrounds* can be viewed as a co-creator in healing and recipient of care.
6. The nurse, in and of oneself, is an energy system – an instrument of healing that can influence the surrounding energetic space.
7. As co-creator, the nurse participates in the aligning and re-patterning of individual and organizational energy systems from within, so a new level of health and adaptability can emerge.
8. Nursing is the interactive relationship between the intentionality of the nurse’s energy system and intentional attention to the alignment within the organizational energy system.
9. Organizational health is accomplished when all parts (agents/energy systems) work together in alignment as one interrelated and integrative system.

This framework incorporates and expands on multiple nursing theories, including but not limited to those of Martha Rogers, Helen Erickson, Margaret Newman, and Rosemarie Rizzo Parse.

The *space that surrounds* is a flexible-yet-strong web, similar in structural concept to the geodesic dome popularized by architect Richard Buckminster Fuller. The geodesic dome promotes tensegrity (created by combining “tension” and “integrity”) or floating compression, where “loads are resisted by a combination of tension and/or compression of the members” that construct the dome (Guzun, 2013, p.1). This flexible relationship results in exceptional strength when aligned, but causes instability across *all parts* should one member be out of alignment.

NURSES AS ENERGY SYSTEMS

The nurse, in and of oneself, is also an energy system – an instrument of healing that can influence the “space that surrounds” and create a higher level of health for all. The holistic nurse envisions oneself as part of the universal paradigm and realizes the sacred responsibility that one’s being, and well-being, affects all: people, processes, structures, and relationships. Everything the nurse does, thinks, and believes influences the energetic space that surrounds.

From this integral perspective, we can recognize ourselves as being a part of, yet inseparable from, the focus of our care. The nurse’s role is no longer limited to caretaker, but is instead co-creator. In this role, nurses participate in the aligning and re-patterning of individual and organizational energy systems from within, just by becoming part of the “space” so a new level of health and adaptability can emerge (Marcus, 2016). The *Holistic Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice* describes how “by patterning her/his own energy field to be unified, harmonious, peaceful, ordered, and calm, the nurse provides the client [or organization] the opportunity within the mutual person-environment process to tune into and resonate with the nurse’s healing frequency” (AHNA & ANA, 2013, p. 17). The nurse’s continuous attention to his/her own self-care provides the surrounding space with a higher vibrational frequency. Like the Zen butterfly who flaps its wings and causes universal movement, this higher vibration supports realignment and opens the opportunity for the organizational energy system to self-organize, adapt, and heal.

NURSING THE ORGANIZATIONAL ENERGY SYSTEM

Now that we are able to see both the organization and the nurse as a unique, inseparable energy system, we can apply nursing methods to create a space that is ready and available for healing to occur. Nurses have a unique privilege of being on the forefront of living within organizational energy systems that constantly respond to the introduction of new energy systems. Every person hired or dismissed, each patient admitted or released, every new process, system, or economic standard initiated shifts the web of relationships and structure of the energy system. Without balance and organizational alignment, these shifts in energy cause stress and result in symptoms like burnout or compassion fatigue. This is evidence that the organizational energy system needs nursing care.

Florence Nightingale envisioned the focus of nursing care to be “the creation of an environment so that natural healing may take place” (Frisch, 2013, p. 120). Helen Erickson’s Modeling and Role-Modeling Theory describes nursing as “a process that demands an interpersonal and interactive relationship with the client” (Frisch, 2013, p. 121). Rosemarie Rizzo Parse’s Theory of Human Becoming viewed the practice of nursing as “an art in which nurses serve as guides to assist others in making choices affecting health” (Frisch, 2013, p. 123). I believe we can incorporate all of these ideas by describing nursing as an interactive relationship between the intentionality of the nurse’s energy system and intentional attention to the alignment within the organizational energy system.

THE 4Cs ALIGNMENT SYSTEM

The 4Cs Alignment System is a tool for assessing the four vibrational frequencies of Clarity, Connection, Compassion and Credibility that offer the most effective energetic stimulus and readiness for change to occur. Through a form of biofeedback, the 4Cs Alignment System assesses the many parts of an organizational energy system that are ready to change. This system assesses communication interactions and holistically identifies the organizational development activities of containing, differentiating, and transformative exchanges (Olson & Eoyang, 2001, p. 11-15) that will augment effective outcomes. The goal is to create balanced alignment, interconnecting a variety of different, complex interactions at a quantum level to eliminate symptoms and effect results unique to each healthcare organizational energy system, (e.g., improved relationships, patient and staff safety, burnout prevention, economic health, and more). This, in turn, influences not only the people (which includes the nurse), processes, structure and relationships within the organization, but the space itself – the Space that Surrounds™.

CLARITY: focused directness of purpose; goals, expectations, verbal and written communication

CONNECTION: joining, linking, and uniting people, ideas, concepts and structures; congruence

COMPASSION: emotional intelligence; feedback from the hearts; consideration, honor, respect; awareness and dignity of self and others

CREDIBILITY: integrity; follow through, discipline; authenticity; obligated courage; humility; trust and safety

Each of these categories can be further reduced into subcategories.

This new application of the concept of nursing promotes conscious and intentional presence to reduce and eliminate system stress and aid in co-creating an adaptable and resilient energetic *space that surrounds*. The *space* becomes fertile, having been cultivated for health at every level. Energetic space invites the nurse to utilize any and all other sources of care, including traditional and complementary approaches, modalities, and techniques. Now all the systems within that energy system are ready and poised to accept the opportunity for realignment and health.

HEALTH, BALANCE AND ALIGNMENT

Over the last 40 years, I have worked with a myriad of organizations to translate holism and the principles of holistic nursing into a model for reducing misalignment created by organizational stress, anxiety, and fear (Marcus, 1977). Through this work, I've observed that healthy organizations typically display the characteristics of four unique vibrational frequencies: Clarity, Connection, Compassion, and Credibility (See 4Cs Alignment System at left). These can be likened to body systems – the mind, body, spirit, and culture of an organization. When an organization shows symptoms of misalignment, the goal is to repattern these frequencies to achieve congruent harmony of all parts to work together in a state of aligned action. The organizational “space that surrounds” goes beyond our present concept of “person” as patient and recipient of nursing care. It allows us to expand the nurse-patient relationship to influence and interact with a complex web of energy systems. Our role in raising the systems' vibrational frequencies can have positive ripple effects that we may never see, but that still affect the organization and the world in a positive way.

As holistic nurses, we understand that treating a patient's symptoms in isolation does not make sense. Taking into account the principles of quantum physics and the idea of interconnected energy systems, we begin to see that we can become instruments of healing through our presence and intentional attention to these four vibrational frequencies within the *space that surrounds*.

By expanding our awareness and consciousness, suspending judgments, and stepping off the edge of our beliefs, we step into the realm of possibilities. I invite you to take that step, and like Christopher Columbus, sail to the edge of the earth.

REFERENCES

American Holistic Nurses Association (AHNA), & American Nurses Association (ANA). (2013). *Holistic nursing: Scope and standards of practice* (2nd ed.). Silver Spring, MD: Nursesbooks.org.

Frisch, N.C. (2013). Nursing theory in holistic nursing practice. In B. M. Dossey, & L. Keegan (Eds.), *Holistic nursing: A handbook for practice* (6th ed., pp. 117-128). Burlington, MA: Jones & Bartlett.

Guzun, I. (2013). Tensegrity: Geodesic domes. Retrieved from <http://www.mace.manchester.ac.uk/project/teaching/civil/structuralconcepts/StudentCoursework/contents/61.pdf>

Lake, E. T., de Cordova, P. B., Barton, S., Singh, S., Agosto, P. D., Ely, B.,...Aiken, L. (2017). Missed nursing care in pediatrics.

Hospital Pediatrics, 7, 378-384. <https://doi.org/10.1542/hpeds.2016-0141>

Marcus, J., & Marcus, R. (1977). “Nursing” the Organization. *Supervisor Nurse: The Journal for Nursing Leadership and Management*, 8(10), 8-12.

Marcus, J. (2016). Personal values: The HEART of holistic nursing. *Beginnings*, 36(1), 6-10.

McElligott, D. (2013). *The nurse as an instrument of healing*. In B.M. Dossey, & L. Keegan (Eds.), *Holistic nursing: A handbook for practice* (6th ed., pp. 827-840). Burlington, MA: Jones & Bartlett.

Olson, E. E., & Eoyang, G. H. (2001). *Facilitating organizational change: Lessons from complexity science*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Pfeiffer.

Rogers, M.E. (1970). *An introduction to the theoretical basis for nursing*. Philadelphia: FA. Davis.

Rovelli, C. (2014). *Reality is not what it seems: The journey to quantum gravity*. New York, NY: Riverhead Books/Penguin Random House.

Jalma Mesnick Marcus, RN, BS, MS, HNB-BC, CBP, AT, CLSE is in private practice working with individuals, families/groups, and teams. She is author of the *Quantum Alignment System, a mind, body, and relationship approach to facilitating organizational health*. Jalma is also Adjunct Faculty in Foundations of Holistic Nursing Practice and Holistic Leadership and Management at Immaculata University. Jalma has previously served on AHNA's practice and advocacy committees and has been on the AHNA Board of Directors for the past four years.





Become a Nationally Board Certified Nurse Coach with an innovative coaching program: The Resilience Paradigm!

4 Series Online, Continuous registration, and Self-Paced Courses will change how you think about Healthcare!



Lyn McCright, MPH, RN, APRN, CNS, AHN-BC, HWNC-BC
Director, Advancing Holistic Health Coaching Program

Nationally Board Certified as a
Health & Wellness Nurse Coach (AHNCC)

AHH Nurse & Health Coaches will light the way.



254-751-7111 | www.AdvancingHolisticHealth.com