Cultivating the Sense of Harmony

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M any of us say that we need to seek balance. For most of us that means finding enough time for family, personal interests, or fun to act as a counterweight to our obligations. Unfortunately, like many busy people, nurse anesthetists can forget to live life.

Nurse anesthetists spend endless hours dedicated to the workplace, where they are constantly exposed to a variety of stressors. Studies note that protracted stress has significant physical and mental consequences for healthcare professionals that can affect health, sometimes to the point of disability, and may even affect patient care. Stress can result in disruption in relationships, fatigue, headaches, gastrointestinal disturbances, weight loss or gain, insomnia, depression, even addictive behaviors. Accompanying behavioral signs are mood swings, frustration, poor tolerance, suspiciousness, feelings of invincibility, and heightened levels of risk-taking.

What is Health?
Not surprisingly, health means different things to different people. In medicine and science, health has a strong physical connotation. For others, the definition includes a whole-person orientation. Florence Nightingale viewed nursing as a healing role in harmony with nature and spiritual practice. In her day, most saw health as the absence of illness. Today, the definition of health integrates the mind, body, and spirit along with numerous external factors. Health management focuses on promoting positive lifestyles, including avoiding stress and unhealthy behaviors.

Stress reactions are natural responses to difficult situations. Relaxation responses harness natural reactions in an attempt to manage those stressful situations. It is important to recognize our own stressors and to learn to employ natural physical and mental de-stressors, such as laughter, walking, music, meditation, and biofeedback.

Emotions play a critical role in human mental processes and actions. An emotional state that arises spontaneously rather than through conscious effort is often accompanied by physiological responses to memories of experiences and emotions. The subconscious mind is receptive to suggestion and responsible for the mental and physical reactions that affect overall health. The roots of stress can often be found in our own minds, creating tension, anxiety and fatigue. For health and well-being, these intense reactions need to be consciously balanced with times of restoration.

Bringing sense to our senses
Nerves convert stimuli from the internal and external environment into impulses that travel to specialized areas of the brain, where they are analyzed. In humans, the classical “five senses” of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch has expanded to include motion, heat, cold, pressure, pain, and balance.

In the prehistoric era, the sense of smell was the most important for survival. Early hunters and gatherers also relied upon shifting changes in daylight and emerging landscapes of colors and forms. This has become part of our genetic code.

Vision, Light, and Color
Currently, vision is the primary source for all our experiences. All living things are affected by light. For example, humans need direct contact with sunlight to regulate the production of hormones. A condition known as Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), caused by a biochemical imbalance in the hypothalamus, is due to the shortening of daylight hours and causes of sleep problems, lethargy, overeating, and depression.

A phenomenon of light, color has significant physical and psychological effects on humans. Color primarily conveys meanings in two ways: natural associations and psychological symbolism. Most colors have both a positive and a negative association. Research has shown the emotional impact of exposure to different colors. Pure red light is stimulating, affecting the sympathetic branch of the autonomic nervous system and increasing heart rate, respiration, and blood pressure. Exposure to pure blue light has the opposite effect, lowering heart rate, respiration, and blood pressure as an effect of the parasympathetic branch of the autonomic nervous system.

Some color effects have universal meaning. The red areas of the color spectrum are known as “warm” colors and evoke emotions ranging from feelings of warmth and comfort to feelings of anger and hostility. Colors on the blue side of the spectrum are known as “cool” colors and are often described as calm, but they can also convey sadness or indifference. Green is the color of harmony and balance; blue is truth and serenity, and purple supports equilibrium and connects with your spiritual self.

Color is a powerful form of communication that is infused into our language. Red means “stop” and green means “go.” You can be “green with envy” or “feel blue” and look at the world through “rose-colored glasses.” The human eye can see 7 million colors. Color can sway thinking, change actions, and cause reactions. It can irritate or soothe your eyes, raise your blood pressure, or suppress your appetite. Other colors and color combinations are soothing. Consequently, the appropriate use of color can maximize productivity, minimize visual fatigue, and relax the whole body.

Room color will affect your perception of temperature. Studies document that people estimate the temperature of a room with cool colors, such as blues and greens, to be 6 to 10 degrees Fahrenheit cooler than the actual temperature. Rooms with warm colors, such as reds and oranges, seem to be 6 to 10 degrees warmer. In the workplace, a red office is stimulating and may cause vigor, anger, or tension, but it also increases performance. Blue in an office may cause greater depression, as...
well as sadness, fatigue, or relaxation, and workers in white offices complain of more headaches and nausea.

Color also influences the perception of food and drink. For instance, red is commonly associated with sweetness, yellow with citrus flavor, and green with healthy vegetables or unripe food.

Mood Music
Sight and hearing define our world, give form to the objects around us, and affect our emotions. Moods or feelings evoked by music and color are uniquely human. The human reaction to color is based on nature’s symbolism, but the human psyche interprets these colors and gives them meaning. As different colors represent different moods, music also touches a human emotional response.

Music, like color, is not easily categorized. Musical styles can be associated with color, texture, and flavor. Think of delta blues, purple, jazz, white noise, and other descriptive attributes such as dark, light, gray, raspy, sweet, sour, sharp, harmonious, and disharmonious. Music can also be described in terms of melody, harmony, and rhythm.

Music engages and relaxes the mind and body. Music lifts our spirits. Music appeals to our inner senses and can untangle stressed nerves by letting the mind bounce to the beat. Music connects to feelings through life experiences, each memory evoking its own emotion.

Harmony and Balance
Harmony can be defined as a pleasing arrangement of parts, whether it be music, poetry, color, or even an ice cream sundae. The world is made up of many harmonies, each a type of unity, connectivity, and equilibrium. Harmony drives the social interests in humans, and harmony of thought and self-identity support spiritual balance. Harmony and predictability exist in the motion of heavenly bodies and the balance of nature. Harmony and symmetry exist in human thought and human behavior, as well as sound, color, numbers, and geometrical shapes.

In visual experiences, harmony is something that pleases the eye, engaging the viewer with an inner sense of order and balance. When something is not harmonious, it’s either boring or chaotic. The human brain rejects what it cannot organize or understand. In music, harmony can be defined as a blending of sounds to produce a pleasing effect. There are many shades of harmony and many ways of generating a pleasant experience. In the art world, harmony is achieved by a pleasing combination of color, light, and composition. It is a balance and a message of the complex desires and capabilities of the artist. In science, harmony is consistently sought and created by the collection, interpretation, and integration of facts and empirical observations.

Harmony is a major aspect we seek personal relationships, working relationships, and nurse-patient relationships. These relationships are affected by the three attributes of harmony: balance, peace, and rhythm. We can identify what harmony is because we can also “know” what is disharmonious.

Harmony is not static—it is dynamic phenomenon, always moving and shifting in response to life demands. A certain degree of discord, jumbled thoughts, feelings, emotions, and other distractions enhance our awareness of spinning out of control, encouraging us to seek ways to better achieve balance and well-being.

Laughter, fun, and play are keys in managing stress and seeking harmony. Laughter reflects sound, music, and color. Laughter is cathartic and provides a way for emotions to be harmlessly released. A good laugh boosts immune function, lowers blood pressure, and reduces stress hormone production. Laughter also triggers the release of endorphins, the body’s natural painkillers, and produces a general sense of well-being. Laughter has been called the most civilized music in the world.

The creation of harmony in our lives is a strategy of beneficial change. As humans we enjoy novelty and excitement, and the current American culture encourages excess of all types, particularly those associated with pleasure and reward. Managing stress and understanding the behaviors that lead to poor choices are valuable skills, tools that enable us to cope with life-threatening situations, while cultivating greater health and well-being.

Wellness and Harmonious Living
Wellness is intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and physical vitality; it is engaging in life-enhancing attitudes and behaviors. Because of their innate ability to provoke responses, color, music, scent, relationships, and recreation can become indispensable tools in bringing balance and harmony into your life. Balance is crucial to reaching inner harmony. In color and music, contrasts intensify and complement the best attributes of each. In balance, strengths and stressors are not opposed but are melded together to achieve harmony.

References


