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## **Exploring Transformative Learning for Student Self-Care in Undergraduate Healthcare Education: An In-Progress Action Research Study**

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### **Abstract**

This presentation highlights the investigation of an Action Research study focused on undergraduate preparedness for student self-care in healthcare education.

*Keywords:* healthcare education; student self-care; well-being; burnout; compassion fatigue; transformative learning

In recent years the healthcare industry has experienced unprecedented challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The lack of preparedness for the chaotic and complex working conditions provoked by COVID-19 was the tipping point for an already overburdened healthcare system, leading to a worldwide crisis of burnout, compassion fatigue, and “the great resignation” (World Economic Forum, 2021; American Hospital Association, 2022). Research shows it not only affects workers, as a 2022 study on the impact of COVID-19 and healthcare published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* states that nearly half (49%) of nurses continued to report that workplace stress affects the quality of care they give to patients (Sexton, et al., 2022). One recent study describes healthcare workplace stress as a “bruises in the soul” crisis, inhibiting the rewarding experience of caregiving often experienced by nurses and other caregivers (Gustafsoon & Hemberg, 2022).

Healthcare is in desperate need of a sustainable path forward for healthcare worker well-being and the care patients receive. At a four-year community access college, faculty serving in a School of Health Sciences oversees undergraduate degree programs for Public Health, Patient Navigation, and Nursing. Faculty currently assist in the continued development of these degree programs and foster student preparedness through course curriculum, applied learning experiences, and extra-curricular activities. In working with collaborative community partnerships for student learning at local hospitals, clinics, and health departments it has not been hard to see the reality of the 21st-century healthcare crisis. It is also not hard to see that current student preparedness efforts in healthcare education fall short of addressing healthcare workplace stressors, and many students are not prepared to survive, much less thrive, amidst the challenges they will soon face. Research shows that self-caring behavior may lessen the impact of healthcare workplace stress (Pipas, 2020; Gustafsoon & Hemberg, 2021; Cuartero-Castaner, et al., 2021).

The opportunity of this research project is to explore undergraduate student preparedness in healthcare education and investigate the transformative potential of educational programming that promotes student learning of self-care. A research team will apply principles from the asset-based approach of Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001) to an Action Research methodology (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014) for the discovery of organizational strengths, processes, and conditions that support the research and development of student preparedness in a School of Health Sciences at a 4-year college. Theoretical constructs from transformative theory will be adopted to inform the design of experiential activities that aim to build student self-care capacity. The overarching research question that will guide the efforts of this Action Research

study is: *What is learned at the individual, group, and system levels that advance the theory and practice of transformation in the context of undergraduate preparedness for student self-care in healthcare education?*

### Roundtable Objectives

This roundtable session will report the preliminary survey and interview data about current student and healthcare worker self-care practices and perceptions related to self-care, and explore constructs from transformative learning pedagogy to invite discussion around transformation in the context of capacity building for student self-care.

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