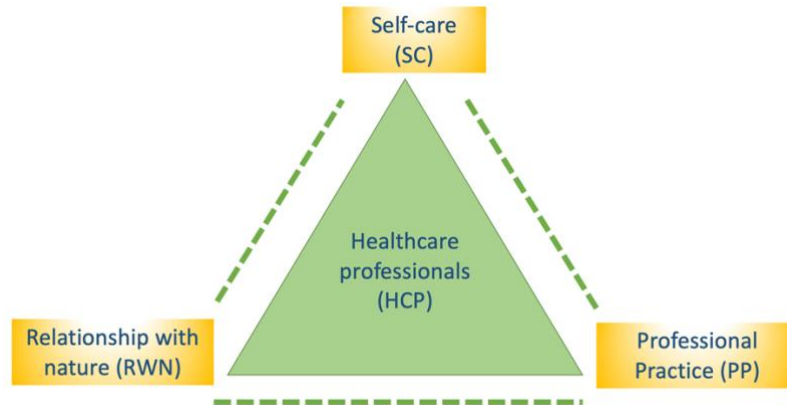


Synthesis Study self-care of healthcare professionals

The relationship between self-care, relationship with nature and the professional practice



We explored this triangle together. From all the conversations, I have distilled patterns. I want to share these with the invitation to indicate what you recognize in yourself. Going through this overview and filling it in takes about fifteen minutes. Would you instead fill it in together? That is possible! Please let me know (best by mail).

I'm inquisitive about how all this comes across to you, to what extent it is recognizable, and what you can gain from it.

Can I ask you to fill out this document and send it back this week (by Friday, 29/04 at the latest), please?

If there are any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Thank you very much in advance for your valuable contribution.

Kind regards,

Ann Sterckx
0474/961391
Ann.Sterckx@uantwerpen.be

1.SELF-CARE

1.1. Self-care, what does it mean for the healthcare professional?

Based on the elements introduced during the various interviews, we arrived at the following definition of self-care:

'Self-care is a developmental issue in which one can grow, supported by creating time and space for oneself, reflecting and taking care of one's basic needs, physical, mental and social health, preserving several types of balance and a certain stability in life, and activities that bring inner peace, rest and relaxation..'

To what extent do you recognize how you would put self-care into words? Are there important elements missing for you?

1.2. How do you do self-care?

With this exploration, we arrived at different strategies that are employed to engage in self-care. We also noted that there could be both conditions or barriers to engaging in effective self-care.

How do you practice self-care? What strategies do you practice? Please check.

1. I PRESERVE TIME FOR MYSELF

Self-care was described as taking the time to reflect on your basic needs by listening to your body and coming to rest within yourself.

2. I TAKE CARE OF MY PHYSICAL AND/OR MENTAL HEALTH

Self-care is about taking care of your physical and mental health. Examples included maintaining a healthy diet and doing exercise (yoga, walking, running, fitness, going into nature), or visiting a counselor or psychologist when needed.

3. I TAKE CARE OF THE SOCIAL ASPECT

Self-care is also seen as caring for and taking time out to spend with partner, family, friends, or the team within a professional context.

4. I MAINTAIN THE BALANCE

Different kinds of balance were mentioned when it comes to self-care: between working and relaxing, between giving and receiving, in the way you can divide your energy between different life domains that are important to you. Or between caring for others and caring for yourself, and finally between feeling good in your professional practice and feeling good at home. Self-care is also understood as focusing on what gives you energy (what is important to you in your life) or doing activities you enjoy and recharging your battery.

5. I CREATE SPACE

Creating space to come to oneself, for self-reflection, and for what you really like to do and what energizes you was also mentioned as a way of self-care. That space can be inner as well as literally a physical place that you have provided for yourself.

6. I SET BOUNDARIES, ALSO TO MYSELF

Self-care was also seen as an ability to set your boundaries, including for yourself.

OTHER?

Complete if necessary ...

1.1. Barriers to do self-care

Sometimes I fail to engage in self-care because of (check, please):

I'M SHORT OF TIME

E.g., 'There is no time left for me to do anything for myself'

I SOMETIMES LACK ENERGY

E.g., 'I'm too tired to put on shoes to go for a walk, to go exercise, ...'

I HAVE LIMITING BELIEFS

E.g. 'Can I allow myself this time, is this OK that I am doing this? What will others say if I do something for myself now?'

I HAVE TO MAKE MORAL CHOICES

E.g. 'I would like to stay at home, but visiting my family is also important; I want to go home, but then I leave my colleague with all the work, ...)'

I EXPERIENCE FINANCIAL PRESSURE OR WORRIES

E.g., 'I have a practice that needs to be paid off, I need to provide an income, I need to see that my additional colleague doctor also has enough patients to provide a wage, ...'

OTHER?

Complete if necessary.

2. RELATIONSHIP WITH NATURE

2.1. How is your interaction with nature?



There are different ways to relate to nature. Conditions and effects were also mentioned.

To what extent do you recognize your interaction with nature? Check which interaction concerns you.

1. I DO ACTIVITIES IN NATURE

You go out into nature to hike or bike. It's a natural environment where you can get fresh air, explore, and discover, move physically, and go on adventure. You sometimes derive health benefits from this. Nature is a context that allows you to do activities there, which contribute to our overall health.

2. I WONDER AND ENJOY BEAUTY

In nature, you allow yourself to wonder and experience a sense of awe. Wondering and enjoying the beauty go together in this. You can sometimes be touched by this. Sometimes you also experience a sense of gratitude. Usually, sensory experiences lead to these feelings, such as hearing the leaves of a tree, smelling a flower, hearing the birds, a river, having an eye for the little things, for growing things. Feelings toward nature such as "amazing" or

"nature is powerful" may also come to mind. All in all, nature has an aesthetic value here.

3. I LEARN FROM NATURE

Nature is for you as a learning context, as a teacher for personal life issues. There are two possible patterns:

The first learning pattern is about gaining knowledge of nature, learning about your natural environment. Informing and learning happens by observing nature or by consulting biological and scientific literature. E.g., by focusing on a particular element of nature and expanding it to a larger whole you gain insight into the cycles of the seasons and how everything is connected. The value placed on nature is that of teacher.

In the second learning pattern, you start picking up metaphors in nature. For example, looking at the same ecological cycles can inform us about how we can be in life. Nature is experienced here as a mirror, a reflection of our inner thoughts and feelings. The value assigned to nature is that of mirror.

4. I EXPERIENCE THE HEALING POWER OF NATURE

You will experience the healing power of nature, for example, in cases of grief, loss experience, or when experiencing stress. This goes hand in hand with feelings of peace and clearing your head. It helps to gain insight into certain worries or helps to view

OTHER? WHICH ONE?

Complete if necessary.

difficult life moments from a different perspective. Otherwise, nature helps you feel happy. You may even find that you get closer to yourself when you go into nature. Nature is appreciated for her healing power.

5. I LET NATURE IN

Being in nature is experienced as something that one can let come in. You are open to what comes, what is perceived and experienced. You allow yourself to be immersed in nature. Nature here has an immersive value.

6. I FEEL PART OF NATURE

You experience a deeper relationship with nature. You feel deeply connected to it, you feel part of it, you feel oneness with nature. It's often evoked through sensory experiences, and is accompanied by feelings of safety, gratitude, being moved, silence and peace, responsibility to care for nature, and feelings of acceptance (of yourself, life situation, the world around you). You can feel it in your heart, showing that it is an emotional experience. As a value, nature is considered here as a greater whole of yourself.

7. I HAVE AN EXISTENTIAL EXPERIENCE

When you go into nature, you have an existential experience, such as "just being", "feeling small in relation to nature", experiencing life "in its wholeness" and the grandeur of nature. Nature takes on an existential value.

2.2. Conditions for experiencing nature

What condition(s) do you recognize for experiencing a deeper relationship with nature? Please check. (More than one is possible)

- Not applicable (you don't experience that deeper relationship).
- You must be able to be open to it, it requires a certain maturity.
- It is important to be physically in nature to experience that sense of connection.
- You must be able to be alone in nature.
- You like being with someone in nature, if they are like-minded to you (e.g., being able to look at the lake together in silence on a bench).
- You need to feel safe (e.g., people don't look at you funny when you lean against a tree or observe something in nature)
- Other

Complete if necessary.

2.3. Benefits of being in nature

What health benefits or effects do you recognize when you go out into nature? Please check. (Several answers are possible)

When I visit nature, then

- I can breathe again.
- I experience the healing power of nature. For example, it offers comfort in grief.
- I feel relaxed.
- I feel happy. I experience happiness.
- I become creative again, I'm getting ideas again.
- I get back energy.
- Other:

Complete if necessary.

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

3.1. How do you do self-care during working?

What statements do you recognize in yourself? Check, please. (More than one is possible)

- I forget to do self-care while I'm at work.
- I apply time management.
- I work with "to-do" lists.
- I apply strategies to keep myself well organized. (E.g., using an external medical secretariat, an automated telephone referral system, etc.)
- I consciously choose to use more time for some patients/clients, to listen and connect.
- I foresee a pause between two consultations.
- I occasionally do self-reflection; I think about how busy I am in my practice. (E.g., like looking at yourself with an imaginary camera.)
- I bring nature inside and around my workplace (plants, garden, nature photos).
- I seek out nature (park, garden, trees, looking at plants, etc.) during my working hours.
- Other? Complete if necessary.

3.2. How do you introduce the topic of self-care with your audience?

What roles do you typically employ when talking about self-care with your patient/client? Please check (More than one is possible).

ROLES	
<input type="checkbox"/> MAPPING	You use a method to question self-care. E.g., you work with a specific diagram or model to explain and question something about self-care. Also introducing emotion regulation, reflecting on limiting thought and behavior patterns, and inviting the patient/client to make a mind map about "who am I as a person" may be applied.
<input type="checkbox"/> STIMULATING	You check with your audience on successful experiences or examples that worked previously.
<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATING	You maintain an educational approach. You explain why it is important to practice self-care.
<input type="checkbox"/> RESEARCHING	You will explore with the patient/client what is working and what is not working. With this, you look for opportunities to engage in self-care.
<input type="checkbox"/> ADVISING	While staying close to the patient/client's world, there are times when you give advice.
<input type="checkbox"/> INSPIRING	You reframe self-care for the patient/client, inviting them to look at things from a different perspective.
<input type="checkbox"/> CRAFTING	You work with your patient/client on installing new habits or patterns.
<input type="checkbox"/> STORYTELLING	You tell a story or anecdote to let something in. It can also be stories you have heard from another patient/client.
<input type="checkbox"/> AWAKENING	You invite the patient/client to reflect. Sometimes it can be questions that wake up the patient/client or show them their blind spots.
<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER?	Complete ...

3.3. How do you introduce the relationship with nature in your professional practice?

What do you apply? What do you recognize of what you do? Check, please.

- I have nature photos (my own or borrowed), plants or a garden in my practice.
- I put nature journals in the waiting room, and/or play nature sounds as music in the waiting room.
- I do this because:
 - I think it is pleasant for the patient/client
 - I want to give a message to the patient that nature is important.
 - For health reasons
 - For ecological reasons
 - Greenery (e.g., plants, nature pictures) in the practice helps me to relax during work (e.g., during a difficult conversation)
- I sometimes prescribe nature and then suggest:
 - To go for a walk in nature
 - To go to meditate in nature
 - To consult an ecotherapist natuurcoach of begeleider op te zoeken die in de natuur werkt
 - To go for a walk in nature with someone else
 - Other (if yes, please describe):
- It sometimes happens that I use metaphors that refer to nature (for example, seasons as cycles in life, ...) or language in which nature is contained (for example: not seeing the forest for the trees, letting oneself go with the flow of the river, ...).
- I also sometimes tell a nature story to the patient/client to inspire or energize.
- Sometimes I go into nature with the patient/client:
 - because the person can then feel more at ease
 - because it can bring oxygen into the conversation
 - to activate the patient/client, as for example in depression
 - because I see it as supporting the care of the patient/client
- I do none of the above

3.4. Which statements fit you?

- By starting the conversation about how nature is present in my life and work, I have become more aware of its importance to me.
- I am mostly concerned with self-care during my free time.
- During my practice, I am less consciously concerned with self-care. Then I focus primarily on patient/client care.
- Whenever possible, I do my home visits by bicycle.
 - I think it's more ecological
 - So then I have movement
- If I have time to spare, I sometimes stop in a park or natural area along the way.
- I feel it is important to attend multiple professional trainings to keep my professionalism at a high level of quality.

- I think working on my personal development is important to keep my professionalism at a high level of quality.
- For me, personal development is also a form of self-care.
- Taking care of oneself is necessary for me to take care of the patient in a professional manner.
- I think of myself as living an ecological lifestyle.
- It is easier for me to give examples of what works for me to do self-care than to share my nature experiences with the patient/client.
- I don't find it professional to talk about my nature experience.
- I think it is too personal to talk about my nature experience.
- I was not aware that I could also talk to my patient/client about how I experience nature.
- The patient/client might find it too strange if I talk about my deeper relationship with nature. I might lose credibility.

IN GENERAL

ARE YOU AMAZED OR SURPRISED ABOUT ANYTHING IN PARTICULAR?

WOULD YOU LIKE TO ADD ANYTHING?

WHAT DID YOU PERSONALLY GAIN FROM THIS INTERVIEW AND REPORT?

DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS? IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU WOULD LIKE TO KNOW? IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU WOULD LIKE TO SAY?

Thank you in advance for your valuable feedback! We are processing your responses and finally you will receive a finished copy of the published article. This will take some time.

ann.sterckx@uantwerpen.be.