The DAISY Award

Meaningful Recognition's Impact on Patients, Nurses, and Organizations

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This review demonstrates the impact of The DAISY Award and how meaningful recognition (MR) through gratitude affects nurse engagement, healthy work environments (HWEs), and patient/families' (PFs) experiences. MR has mutual benefits for nurses and PFs, promoting therapeutic healing and resiliency. MR in HWEs can impact organizations' care quality, fiscal health and influence public perceptions. Nurse leaders should create an environment where MR is a core strategic imperative that impacts nurse, patient, and organizational outcomes.

Meaningful recognition (MR) can positively impact the individual nurse, organization, and patient. For the nurse, it can improve self-esteem, self-worth relative to work, increase self-reflection and self-awareness, decrease burnout, increase compassion satisfaction, foster professional development, and provide purpose in work.1-4 Organizational benefits include nurse retention, nursing engagement, job satisfaction and embeddedness,1 and better organizational performance.2,5 For patients, nurses empowered by MR can impact care quality, improve patient outcomes and satisfaction.1 MR differs from routine rewards because of a lasting influence on the recipient(s).6-8

An international program to recognize nurses for compassionate, extraordinary care is The DAISY (Diseases Attacking the Immune SYstem) Award for Extraordinary Nurses®, established in 1999 in memory of J. Patrick Barnes. The DAISY Foundation was developed by Patrick’s family to express their gratitude for nursing care Patrick received and to honor nurses and is in over 6,550 healthcare facilities and schools.9 The DAISY Award Impact Model (Figure 1) has 3 components: nurse engagement, healthy work environment (HWE) and patient/family (PF) experience.2 The purpose of this review is to examine the impact of The DAISY Award (DAISY) in expressing gratitude through MR.

Meaningful Recognition and Nurses

Recognition needs to be meaningful, timely, congruent with organizational goals and delivered by someone respected by the recipient. For the individual, empirical referents in a MR review, included expressions of affirmation, warm gestures (intrinsic motivators), tangible incentives (extrinsic motivators) such as monetary awards and DAISY.1,10 Conversely, recognition not considered meaningful can reduce job satisfaction.11 Millennial nurses reported recognition from patients/colleagues improved their job satisfaction and engagement.12 MR increased compassion satisfaction13,14 and lowered burnout.13,15

Mattering is a social psychology construct about making a difference in others’ lives with significance in one’s community. Mattering at work showed greater nurse engagement and less burnout. Experiencing mattering at work found at the top was the patient relationship (52%), followed by feeling appreciated, professional competence, interaction with colleagues,
experiences with the organization, going the extra mile and being cared for as a person. One quote about feeling appreciated resonates with DAISY’s impact: “A patient specifically mentioned my name as someone who went out of their way to take care of them and make them comfortable.”

Researchers examined gratitude during health encounters at life’s end. For the clinicians, professional affirmation emerged. As noted in this clinician’s quote: “For me, the tokens of gratitude from a patient give meaning to my work.” The connection of receiving gratitude and reflecting on the meaningfulness of caring is a formidable one integrated into the DAISY process.

Nursing Gratitude Practice
Expressing gratitude can improve well-being, including physical and mental health. Practicing gratitude in one’s personal and professional life is a powerful tool to improve overall quality of life. Nurses work in a complex, highly stressful environment and strategies are employed to reduce burnout and promote well-being, with gratitude as one strategy. Based on research, the American Nurse Foundation (ANF) and Greater Good Science Center (GGSC) created a gratitude practice toolkit for nurses, noting “grateful people report higher levels of happiness and life satisfaction, are more resilient to stress, get along better with others, are less depressed, achieve more, and are more helpful and generous.” Gratitude writing prompts among healthcare professionals found improvements on emotional exhaustion, subjective happiness, and work-life balance.

Positive psychology can enhance well-being and gratitude is one intervention to help attain optimal health. Macfarlane suggests increased awareness about gratitude and using it in practice for patients and to foster teamwork. In a meta-narrative review, gratitude in the context of staff well-being increased job satisfaction, reduced absenteeism, positively impacted retention and teamwork, and gratitude from patients can protect clinicians from burnout. As a giving profession that can succumb to compassion fatigue, recognizing the good in nursing and intentionally showing appreciation can contribute to nurses’ overall well-being.

Healthy Work Environments and Meaningful Recognition
Healthy work environments (HWEs) have a great impact on nurses and the patients they care for. An unhealthy work environment has shown to influence nurses’ intention to leave their job or profession and affect patient care quality. The American Association of Critical-Care Nurses (AACN) developed standards for HWEs, including MR. In HWEs’ study, nurses report recognition is most meaningful when it comes from PFs (39%), followed by other RNs, and frontline nurse managers. Furthermore, 53% of participants who strongly agreed recognition impacted job satisfaction had no intent to leave their position.

AACN’s Beacon Award™ recognizes units for exceptional care in a positive and supportive work environment that is collaborative, with high morale and less turnover. Nurses on Beacon units or units working toward it reported healthier WEs and higher quality care than those who were not. MR, such as DAISY, is a critical element to create and sustain a HWE. Examining factors that influence nurses’ intent to leave based on the WE, recognition was an intervention that can support nurse retention. Studies of a HWE found MR an important predictor of nurses’ well-being. Nurses’ WEs includes MR as one method to enhance well-being and resiliency among nurses, which in turn can improve patient outcomes. Furthermore, if MR programs are present, it can minimize the effects of secondary traumatic stress. Intrinsic MR that can help foster HWEs is reflective practice which finds meaning in work. DAISY’s impact on the HWE may include improved recruitment, retention, extraordinary compassionate care and enhanced nurses’ well-being and resilience.

Programs recognizing nursing excellence, the Magnet Recognition Program® and Pathway to Excellence® program (Pathway), include recognition criteria as an important element of credentialing. Magnet® focuses on organizational nursing excellence, innovative practice, and nursing care and its impact on patient outcomes; Pathway focuses on a positive, supportive practice environment with shared decision-making for clinical practice and well-being. Both programs promote DAISY as a way for MR to improve the image and practice of nursing.
Nursing Attributes / Patient and Family Gratitude

In Aparicio, et al.,6 PFs were grateful for competent care, however, it was the human connection in their care they were most grateful for. There is an expectation of clinical skill, but going beyond skill to excel at human competencies is valued and exhibits behaviors such as: listening, explaining care, being present, being respectful, empathetic, compassionate, and courteous.6,30,31

In studying DAISY nominations to identify themes and behaviors, PFs expressed gratitude for nursing care with 5 core themes for recognition. The behaviors associated with MR included: being empathetic, displaying compassion, being attentive, kind, providing emotional support, being knowledgeable, efficient, explaining care in understandable terms, being present and listening.30 Results in other studies were congruent with similar behaviors.10,31 Behaviors nominated were consistent with the nominators’ descriptions.31

In 1 study, themes about nurses’ behaviors related to interactions with colleagues such as, teaches others, exalted by co-worker, nurse-doctor collaboration, and praises others were shared. This study gained insight into how colleagues view extraordinary nursing in the context of working with a DAISY nurse. Interviews were conducted with DAISY recipients, and nurse leaders who implemented the DAISY program. Key findings included: MR programs can increase nursing value by nominators describing extraordinary care and its impact, highlighting behaviors that constitute extraordinary care and celebrating the recognition, ultimately strengthening the workforce.10

Patient and Family Gratitude and Nursing Care

Studies found PFs expressing gratitude to providers had a positive impact on patients’ healing, care experience,32,33 psychological well-being, quality of life,19 physical well-being, stress reduction, anxiety reduction in the face of death6 and customer loyalty to a provider or organization.2,34 Moreover, expressing gratitude can help with the grieving process for families. Just as clinicians experienced benefits from gratitude during end-of-life care, patients experienced “healing or deep relief” as components of gratitude.17 A nurse-led patient-centered gratitude intervention was helpful and improved patients' hospital experience.32 Gratitude has been used as a positive intervention in therapy for addiction disorders.19,21 In people hospitalized for addiction, gratitude had a significant correlation with quality of life and well-being.19 The gratitude of letter writing has shown an impact on well-being of the recipient and the writer.3 The evidence shows expressing gratitude can help healing and shows promise as part of a therapeutic regimen for mental health.

In a study on the DAISY program, recipients felt supported at their organization. Increasing the awareness of the award, significance of communicating to the nominator receipt of nomination and to recognize all nominees was reported.35 Gratitude in healthcare can elicit benefits for the recipient and the individual expressing thanks.36 PFs who completed a DAISY nomination were interviewed about what it meant to them and the behavioral themes in their nomination. Three themes emerged: experiencing extraordinary care, synergy of the human connection and gratitude that transcends the moment. Extraordinary care helped the nominator navigate vulnerability and acknowledge the care in a meaningful way; synergy of the human connection espoused the art and science of nursing, and gratitude that transcends the moment happened with feelings of giving back, healing, genuine gratitude, and altruism.33 DAISY allows for the patient-nurse relationship to foster mutual gratitude for both parties; being recognized helps nurses’ well-being and resilience, and the PFs’ gratitude can help their therapeutic healing.

Public’s Expression of Gratitude of Nursing Through Meaningful Recognition

The public’s expression of gratitude and perception for nursing care matters. There have been varied portrayals of nursing that can impact recruitment and retention and the perceived value of nursing care. As the most trustworthy occupation for over 20 years in the U.S., the public deemed nurses the most ethical, honest profession in America.37 Even years ago, the public perceived nursing as a respected career. This study showed the impact of the media featuring nurses as a positive influence, yet a nursing shortage prevailed.38 The publics’ perception and media portrayal of the profession can be impactful to develop a stable nursing force.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, healthcare professionals and particularly nurses, were dubbed as heroes in the fight against COVID-19. An outpouring of gratitude was witnessed throughout the country and helped nurses build resiliency to continue to enter a world of uncertainty for their patients’ welfare, putting their own health at risk. They served as the conduit between PFs who were unable to see their loved ones suffering from serious illness. This public MR resonated with nurses who honored their commitment to patients in need. This sentiment was verified in a study examining nursing compared to other healthcare professionals during COVID-19. A positive
correlation between the public’s perceptions toward nursing was greater than with other professions.49 Having a program that attends to MR during most challenging times and in everyday practice, can enhance nurses’ resiliency and resolve.7 With a global pandemic, and numerous challenges, most nurses did not intend to leave their job during this time and 90% had no intention of leaving the profession.23

Although studies have demonstrated the public perceives nursing as a highly regarded profession, there continues to be negative portrayals of the profession in the media about critical nursing shortages at hospitals and the detrimental effects of an unstable nursing workforce. There is a need to demonstrate the positive aspects of nursing in the media. In 2002, the J&J Campaign for Nursing’s Future was successful in recruiting into the profession, resulting in an increase in enrollment and graduations in nursing schools.40,41 With the recent praise for the profession following the pandemic, Buerhaus recommends taking advantage of this and showing an optimistic depiction of nurses, to avoid repeating the 1990s’ national shortage.41 The public trusts nurses to improve health42 and the U.S. healthcare system.43 It is imperative to leverage the current positive image of nursing to garner interest and elevate the profession with the public’s support. Having PFs publicly recognize nurses via the DAISY award and sharing stories about extraordinary care can contribute to altering the narrative about the profession.

Compassion practices include compassionate care, an organization’s recognition of compassionate acts, and compassionately supporting its employees. A study showed there was a positive correlation with compassionate practices and HCAPHS’s overall rating and patients’ likelihood to recommend the organization. Compassion practices can be used to improve customer satisfaction and promote better service quality ratings.44 When nurses are honored publicly, the behaviors noted by PFs of extraordinary care are reinforced and can influence patient satisfaction.10

In the Gallup & Workhuman study,6 it was estimated recognition in an organization’s culture can save up to $16.1 million annually due to reduced employee turnover. Furthermore, recognition programs can improve employee productivity, safety and reduce absenteeism.45 Ultimately, having or not having MR programs can affect an organization’s bottom line. Having the public express gratitude for extraordinary nursing care can translate into recommending an organization as a desirable place for nurses to work, patients to receive care and garner organizational support for a culture of recognition.

**Nursing Leadership Implications**

At the chief nursing officer (CNO) level, including MR as part of the strategic plan that cascades to the unit leaders is critical to reap the benefits of MR. As a business imperative, MR is not a costly investment for the organization with impactful outcomes for patients, nurses, and organizations. MR has shown to promote well-being, care quality and healing for patients expressing gratitude, improved the public’s perception of nursing, fosters nurse resiliency, lowers burnout, improves compassion satisfaction, recruitment, and retention, and impacts the organization’s bottom line and loyalty from patients. MR is essential for nursing credentialing programs and DAISY is an already established world-recognized MR program that CNOs can easily implement in their organization. This review has shown The DAISY Award impacts nurse engagement, healthy work environments (HWEs), and PFs’ experiences which are at the core of creating a stable nursing workforce. Implementing a MR program, whether it is DAISY, or another methodology is vital to an organization to achieve nursing excellence and reach strategic goals. A literature review summary table of the articles used in this review from 2012–2023 (SDC# 1, http://links.lww.com/JONA/B178) has more detailed information about these articles including, key findings and recommendations.

**References**


