

# Group Dream Work: A Holistic Resource for Oncology Nurses

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**Purpose/Objectives:** To explore dream work as a possible means for nurses to increase self-understanding and problem solving in personal and professional life.

**Design:** Hermeneutic phenomenologic, descriptive, and interpretive.

**Setting:** A comprehensive cancer center in the southern United States.

**Sample:** Six nurses with a mean age of 40 and 1–10 years of oncology nursing experience.

**Methods:** Interviews, guided by descriptive and interpretive phenomenology, were conducted with nurses before and one and six months after they participated in eight weekly sessions of a group focused on dream work. Phenomenologic analysis was done on verbatim transcriptions of all interviews.

**Findings:** Nurses found value in participating in dream groups, including having more open discussions about feelings and death, managing difficult situations, and attending to patients in the present.

**Conclusions:** The value of learning to attend to dreams may be subtle but has value to nurses.

**Implications for Nursing:** Incorporating dream work is one holistic intervention that may be useful to improve job satisfaction, communication, and relationships in this time of nursing shortage.

Studies suggest that openness to new knowledge about oneself, understanding of dream content, and interpersonal dialogue about dreams may influence self-actualization and resolution of personal conflict and enhance the social adjustment of the dreamer (Barrineau, 1996; Stefanakis, 1995; Strauch & Meier, 1996). Experimental dream research has found that dreamers “transform memories and waking impressions into fresh experiences, thus giving them a new life. Meaningful dream elaborations may contribute to the comprehension of waking experiences and to attempts at problem-solving” (Strauch & Meier, p. 241). Goldberger (1994) suggested that those who became aware of the meaning of their dream content increased their ability to create compromise out of conflict, to perceive and resolve specific dangers, and to experience a fuller range of feelings when awake. In accordance with Adlerian theory, dreams provide a summary of a person’s thinking about the current issues of life (Slavik, 1994). In summary, dream literature has discussed how dreams affect dreamers’ self-development, awareness of the continuity of life (Lamb & Hollis, 1994), ability to find new meaning, and ability to cope with modern stressors (Harrison, 1994).

Continued focus on these and other factors that could improve job satisfaction and reduce burnout is especially important in the current nursing shortage, which is pervasive, and especially serious in high-stress nursing situations such as cancer nursing (Buerhaus, Donelan, DesRoches, Lamkin, & Mallory, 2001).

## Key Points . . .

- Small group dream work provides opportunity for phenomenologic and psychological meaning.
- Self-analysis, “the dreamer as authority,” is essential.
- Nurses showed more awareness of their own feelings and those of patients and coworkers in interviews after the group dream work.
- Organizations can incorporate small group dream work as a resource for nurses’ personal fulfillment.

Evidence of serious dissatisfaction among nurses increases the need for creative ways, such as group dream work, to improve job satisfaction among nurses (Corey-Lisle, Tarzian, Cohen, & Trinkoff, 1999; Johnston, 1997; Shindul-Rothschild, Berry, & Long-Middleton, 1996).

Recognizing that nurses seek to know more about themselves and the care that they provide to patients and are open to new information, the researchers designed this study to understand the meaning of nurses’ work before and after they participated in small group dream work and nurses’ experiences in these groups. The purpose was to explore dream work as a possible means for nurses to increase self-understanding and problem solving in day-to-day personal and professional life.

In a multisite study of the meaning of oncology nursing, nurses described three nursing roles (Steeves, Cohen, & Wise, 1994). The first role, maintaining the goals and values of health care, described nurses’ part in saving lives. They fought the disease of cancer and aligned their work with physicians’ work. A second role, participating in the personal lives and experiences of patients and their families, described nurses’ “being there” for patients with cancer as they dealt with the

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