

Gratitude Practice for Nurses

**IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE TO
THE TOOLKIT FOR WELL-BEING**

Overview

The American Nurses Foundation (Foundation) and the Greater Good Science Center (GGSC) at the University of California, Berkeley, are pleased to present this **Implementation Guide**, a supplemental resource to the [Gratitude Practice for Nurses Toolkit for Well-Being](#), as part of the Gratitude Practice for Nurses initiative.

This guide is designed for nurses, nurse managers, and other health care professionals to use when introducing gratitude practices to their colleagues and teams and suggests ways to apply the gratitude resources and practices in the Toolkit within different health care contexts and with larger groups.

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Acknowledgments

The **Gratitude Practice for Nurses Implementation Guide**, a supplement to the [Gratitude Practice for Nurses Toolkit for Well-Being](#), has been developed through collaboration between the American Nurses Foundation and the Greater Good Science Center at the University of California, Berkeley.

The [American Nurses Foundation](#) is the philanthropic arm of the American Nurses Association, the premier organization representing the interests of the nation's four million registered nurses. The Foundation seeks to achieve a healthy world through the power of nursing by elevating the profession of nursing globally, engaging all nurses to ensure professional success, and evolving the practice of nursing to transform health and health care.

The [Greater Good Science Center](#) at the University of California, Berkeley, studies the psychology, sociology, and neuroscience of well-being, and teaches skills that foster a thriving, resilient, and compassionate society. The GGSC has been a leader in helping people apply the science of social and emotional well-being to their personal and professional lives, particularly through its award-winning online magazine, [Greater Good](#).

We are especially grateful for the support of the Gratitude Practice for Nurses Advisory Group, whose members include nurses and nurse managers from a variety of health care contexts and organizations around the country. The advisory group's insights and direct experience in the nursing field were immensely helpful to the design and development of the Gratitude Practice for Nurses initiative.

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Building a Culture of Gratitude

THE CHALLENGES OF OUR HEALTH CARE ENVIRONMENTS

As the largest and most trusted health care profession, nurses are critical to the health of the nation. Their unique contributions to the health of those in their care are vast and multi-dimensional—yet often under-appreciated. Their very role as caregivers and healers often places nurses in challenging life-or-death contexts in which to carry out their work. The high-pressure, high-stress conditions in which nurses work create ongoing physical and emotional challenges that can lead to exhaustion, burnout, and overall poor health.

What should be an environment of caregiving can, under these extremely stressful conditions, become an environment where bullying and shame predominate and nurses' safety and health concerns take a backseat. Without access to support, training, or opportunities to cultivate wellness, it's no surprise that nurses often find it difficult to prioritize their own health and happiness and provide self-care where it is needed most.

Severe and prolonged levels of stress can lead to a multitude of mental and physical health issues among nurses. If these issues are not addressed, ultimately patient care suffers, as nursing staff become disengaged and even opt to leave their profession.

GRATITUDE: A BALM FOR WELL-BEING

As the nursing profession—and health care as a whole—looks to address this crisis of exhaustion, burnout, and poor health among its caregivers, many health care leaders are turning their attention to an innovative remedy: gratitude.

Science tells us that recognizing, appreciating, and giving thanks for positive moments in our lives can be a healing balm that provides a host of benefits for our minds, bodies, and relationships. According to a considerable body of research, grateful people:

- Report higher levels of happiness and life satisfaction—in one study, grateful people were [25 percent happier](#) than the other study participants!
- Are more resilient to stress.
- Get along better with others.
- Are less depressed.
- Achieve more.
- Are more helpful and generous.

More specifically to health care settings, research has shown that gratitude can reduce stress and depression among health care providers and lead to improved productivity and quality of patient support. Putting gratitude practices in the hands of nurses is one way to foster greater health and well-being.

The **Gratitude Practice for Nurses** campaign aims to raise greater awareness about the benefits and research-based methods for fostering gratitude that can be incorporated into health care settings, specifically to benefit nurses. Furthermore, by getting specific, research-based resources into the hands of nurses and nurse managers, the experience and expression of gratitude among—and for—nurses can become more prevalent, thus strengthening positive connections and morale across their organizations.

It's one thing to support gratitude on an individual basis. But true organizational change happens when we work to foster an overall culture of gratitude in health care settings. Our research and conversations with health care partners points to these best practices for building a culture of gratitude within organizations:

Hardwiring gratitude

Efforts to foster gratitude are most effective when they are built into organizational culture, supporting individual practice while working toward systemic change. When gratitude is practiced and encouraged by everyone from leadership to caregivers and patients, it creates a surround sound that makes gratitude part of the everyday experience across the organization.

To build gratitude into the foundation of your organization, consider taking a comprehensive approach, [creating multiple pathways](#) for all people in your organization to engage with gratitude practices, both individually and in groups:

- **Recognize helpfulness:** Foster appreciation programs and gratitude expression initiatives to celebrate staff who support their colleagues.
- **Highlight ability to help others:** Enable direct contact with beneficiaries of your work, foster volunteer programs, channel organizational pride.
- **Steward the opportunity to learn and build skills:** Give developmental feedback, strengthen motivation.

Campaigns like the Gratitude Practice for Nurses initiative that are rolled out within an organization can help to build awareness and appreciation for the benefits of gratitude under one recognizable program heading. Consider developing a customized campaign of your own!

Voluntary participation

Expressions of gratitude and gratitude programs should not be forced on employees. Rather, gratitude needs to be fostered in a way that respects staff time. This is particularly true within health care, given the demands and urgency many caregivers face daily. Gratitude cannot be yet another thing nurse caregivers are obligated to do. It's important to make it something they want to do.

Maintaining authenticity

Gratitude should be a practice that is encouraged and allowed to grow organically. As such, people need room to express gratitude in thoughtful, personalized ways. It's important to strike the right balance between hardwiring gratitude to the extent that it is part of the organizational routine, yet also allowing each expression of gratitude to be original and genuine. Consider that some may wish to express gratitude verbally while others would prefer to do so in written form or through quiet reflection.

Making gratitude a recurring activity

The most successful efforts to foster gratitude are ones that happen throughout the year, even though the Thanksgiving and end-of-year holidays are particularly suited to raising awareness about gratitude and its benefits. Gratitude will thrive when it's not just done as part of discrete programs or at certain times of the year but is connected to other, recurring efforts to foster a positive, caring culture. Consider ways to continually embed gratitude practices and exchanges of appreciation into regular staff meetings and gatherings. Look for opportunities to build gratitude reminders into the physical environment through posters, positive quotes, and the use of a gratitude wall or bulletin board.

Developing an array of tools for well-being & resilience

Gratitude practices have been helpful in assisting many health care organizations to foster well-being among their staff and patients. Yet, gratitude is not the only path to wellness. Mindfulness techniques, training caregivers in the art of compassion, and engaging in campaigns to encourage kindness are all practices that, together with gratitude, offer an array of tools that staff can use. In fact, these practices may help to build and reinforce the practice of gratitude. Access to a variety of these practices can help to strengthen overall nurse well-being, build resilience, and provide a positive professional environment that enables and supports nurses in effective clinical practice.

How to Use this Guide

This guide is intended to help nurses, nurse managers, and other health care professionals share content from the [Gratitude Practice for Nurses Toolkit for Well-Being](#) with their colleagues, supporting their individual and collective well-being. Components of the Toolkit—such as the Why Gratitude Matters for Nurses slide deck, The Benefits of Gratitude poster, and the Resource List—are intended to support health care leaders in building awareness around the benefits of gratitude for well-being and the research and science that underscores those benefits.

The Toolkit also includes a series of research-based practices for fostering gratitude that can be performed individually, in groups, or across a department or organization. This guide explains how leaders can effectively share those practices with their colleagues to get greater buy-in and adoption. It includes: talking points they can use when introducing those practices, drawing on relevant research; steps they can take to weave these practices into staff meetings or other professional settings; and reflection questions they can use to help attune their colleagues to the significance and impact of these practices.

Lastly, this guide includes a section on how to create a community of practice in your organization, should you want to promote a deeper practice of gratitude and make it part of your organizational culture.

All of the practices and resources referenced here and in the Toolkit are free and available for you to use, adapt, and build upon for your unique needs and the needs of your nursing community. While these are part of the 2021 Gratitude Practice for Nurses initiative offered by the American Nurses Foundation and the Greater Good Science Center, you may want to build upon these offerings to develop your own custom gratitude campaign.

Sharing the “Why Gratitude Matters for Nurses” Slide Presentation

We encourage you to use the “Why Gratitude Matters for Nurses” slide deck with your teams as an introduction to the health benefits of gratitude and to some of the scientific studies around the practice of gratitude that have shown great promise for people’s well-being.

The slide deck is divided into three main sections:

- An introduction to gratitude and some of the benefits of practicing gratitude.
- A series of slides highlighting scientific studies that underscore the mental and physical health benefits of practicing gratitude.
- A section on best practices around building a culture of gratitude.

When you download the Toolkit for Well-Being, you will also receive (via email) the slide deck as a separate PowerPoint file that allows you to add or remove slides to customize it for your particular audience and setting.

You may find some of the slides can serve as individual “sound bites” you can offer to your teams. For example, consider sharing just one or two in team or departmental gatherings and accompanying them with one of the gratitude activities found in the Toolkit (which are discussed further in this Implementation Guide).

Sharing “The Benefits of Gratitude” Poster

Another component of the Gratitude Practice for Nurses Toolkit is “The Benefits of Gratitude” infographic.

You can print and display this 18” x 24” poster-sized visual in prominent nurses’ spaces as a reminder of the many ways that practicing gratitude supports the health of our bodies, minds, and relationships.



Cultivating the Practice of Gratitude in Nursing

The Toolkit contains eight evidence-based activities for fostering gratitude in health care settings, either individually or as a team. Below we walk through each of those eight activities, suggesting ways that you can plan for, introduce, and facilitate them among your colleagues, as well as reflect upon them afterwards. This material makes it easier for you to weave gratitude practices into your workday and to deepen their impact on yourself, your colleagues, and your organization.

Action #1 | Gratitude 123

PLANNING FOR IT

While Gratitude 123 is practiced individually, it requires you to say “thank you” to someone else for something that person did that had a positive impact on you. In this way, it inherently lends itself to group and organizational settings.

Consider embedding this action in a team gathering or huddle (see Action #6: Gratitude Huddle) as a way to express gratitude to other individuals on your team. As you build a culture of gratitude within your organization, you might also periodically highlight the importance of these three components of expressing gratitude that can make it an especially powerful exchange.

INTRODUCING IT

You can introduce this practice with the following talking points:

- Every day, we’re surrounded by colleagues who help make our workday better through a kind and selfless act.
- But we don’t often have the opportunity to acknowledge those kind acts directly to them—we’re too busy, or they’re too busy, or we don’t have a way to tell them we noticed their actions without it seeming awkward.
- Yet we know from research that expressing gratitude for those kind acts has positive benefits both for the person who gives gratitude and the person who receives it, and it strengthens connections between them.
- The more specific we can be in naming what a person did for us, acknowledging the investment of thoughtfulness it required, and how their action benefitted us, the deeper the resonance of our gratitude.
- When people are part of a culture of gratitude in their organization, they feel better about their jobs. Yet past research has found that people are least likely to express gratitude at work than anywhere else.
- So, we’re creating space in this setting for each of us to express gratitude for someone else’s kind or selfless act, and to do so in a very specific way.
- Here’s how to do it. [Move on to the How to Do It section below.]

HOW TO DO IT

This practice involves saying “thank you” to someone else with three important components:

- 1) Describing what that other person did for you.
- 2) Acknowledging the effort their actions required and the admirable quality their efforts exemplify.
- 3) Explaining how their actions helped or benefitted you.

You can share this within a team setting as an important framework for expressing gratitude for the kind acts of others. Encourage your team to use these three steps as a guide for expressing gratitude to another person. Consider posting these three components of gratitude on the walls of workplace settings to serve as a warm reminder to others.

Refer to Action #6 to see how this activity could be woven into a Gratitude Huddle.

POST-ACTIVITY REFLECTIONS

At your next staff meeting, ask people who tried Gratitude 123 to share their experiences with it.

- How did it feel to be able to express gratitude in this way?
- How did it feel to be on the receiving end of this expression of gratitude?
- How did the experience stay with you beyond that encounter (or encounters)? Did it generate positive benefits that spilled over into other areas of your work or personal life?

Action #2 | Gratitude Letter

PLANNING FOR IT

While the Gratitude Letter is usually written on one's own, it can be adapted to any setting, even work environments. Written expressions of gratitude can allow for opportunities to express thanks to a colleague in a very deliberate and thoughtful manner, and they are especially poignant when you can deliver your letter directly to the person you're thanking.

Consider introducing this practice during an upcoming staff meeting, using the talking points below to encourage people to try writing a gratitude letter before the next staff meeting. Or, if you can, carve out time during your meeting to have staff members quietly write a gratitude letter or note to someone they want to thank. Making nice notecards or stationery available for staff can make the activity and the letter itself feel even more special.

INTRODUCING IT

You can introduce this practice with the following talking points:

- Taking the time to express gratitude for someone's kindness or support is an important way to share how that person's actions made a positive impact on you. We know from research that expressing gratitude for those kind acts has positive benefits for the person who gives and receives gratitude, and it strengthens connections between them.
- One way we can express gratitude is by verbally saying "thank you" to another person. But when we take time out from our day to write down our gratitude in a note or letter to someone, we're stepping into an even deeper expression of gratitude.
- Writing a gratitude letter to someone involves taking time to pause and reflect on how their actions really touched us. It can allow us to savor the positive feelings that someone's kindness conjured in us. Research suggests that writing a gratitude letter to someone can have lasting effects on our mental well-being.

- The more specific we can be in naming what a person did for us, acknowledging the investment of thoughtfulness it required, and how their action benefitted us, the deeper resonance our gratitude can have.
- We're all extremely busy, working hard from the moment we start our shifts until the time we're done. So today, we're going to take a brief pause from that busyness to call to mind someone here who did something for us for which we are extremely grateful but to whom we haven't expressed our deep gratitude.
- We'll pass out stationary/notecards/paper and take the next couple of minutes in quiet reflection to write a short gratitude letter to a colleague. In the time that we have, you could consider just jotting down a few key details, then return to this letter later to elaborate.
- Here's how to do it. [Move on to the How to Do It section below.]

HOW TO DO IT

Set aside 10-15 minutes of time to lead your team in writing a gratitude letter. Provide the following steps to guide them as they write:

- 1) Write as though you are addressing this person directly ("Dear _____")
- 2) Don't worry about perfect grammar or spelling.
- 3) Describe in specific terms what this person did, why you are grateful to this person, and how this person's behavior affected your life. Try to be as concrete as possible.
- 4) Describe what you are doing in your life now and how you often remember his or her efforts.
- 5) Try to keep your letter to roughly one page (~250 words).

If at all possible, encourage participants to deliver their letter in person (or, if that's not possible, by phone or video call), following these steps:

- 1) Plan a visit with the recipient. Let that person know you'd like to see them and have something special to share, but don't reveal the exact purpose of the meeting.
- 2) When you meet, let the person know that you are grateful to them and would like to read a letter expressing your gratitude; ask that they refrain from interrupting until you're done.
- 3) Take your time reading the letter. While you read, pay attention to their reaction and yours.
- 4) After you have finished, be receptive to their reaction and discuss your feelings together.
- 5) Remember to give the letter to the person when you leave.

POST-ACTIVITY REFLECTIONS

At your next staff meeting, ask people who tried the Gratitude Letter to share their experiences with it.

- How did it feel to be able to express gratitude in this way?
- If you were able to read the letter to the person you thanked, were you afraid that it would feel awkward? How did it actually feel?
- Was anyone on the receiving end of a Gratitude Letter? How did that feel?
- How did the experience stay with you beyond that encounter (or encounters)? Did it generate positive benefits that spilled over into other areas of your work or personal life?

Action #3 | Gratitude Journal

PLANNING FOR IT

While keeping a Gratitude Journal is a practice that you and your colleagues can try by yourselves, you can also make it a group activity.

Consider introducing this practice during an upcoming staff meeting, using the talking points below to encourage people to try the gratitude journal before you all meet again. Then when you reconvene at the next meeting, invite them to share their experiences with it. You might consider handing out small notebooks or journals for staff to write in—to keep all of their reflections in one place to look back on and read periodically.

INTRODUCING IT

You can introduce this practice with the following talking points:

- I know we're all extremely busy, working hard from the moment we start our shifts until the time we're done. And when we're done, we often feel exhausted and have all kinds of additional demands of our time and energy after work.
- But taking just a few minutes at the end of our shift or end of our day to call to mind things that we're grateful for can significantly improve our mental and physical well-being.
- Research suggests we can deepen the benefits of the good things around us by consciously savoring them rather than letting them pass us by or taking them for granted.
- So, I'd like to suggest that we try an exercise called the Gratitude Journal. It's designed to help us savor the good things around us by recalling a good event, experience, person, or thing in our day or in our life, and enjoying the good emotions that come with it.
- At its root, this practice is all about fostering a grateful mindset: noticing, appreciating, and giving thanks for subtle pleasures in our life rather than just taking them for granted.
- When we write things down, not just conjure them up in our heads, the act of remembering and savoring is stronger and stays with us longer.
- The goal of the exercise is to remember a good event, experience, person, or thing in your life, then enjoy the good emotions that come with it.
- Here's how to do it. [Move on to the How to Do It section below.]

HOW TO DO IT

At the end of each shift or at the end of your workday, find a quiet spot away from the rush of activity around you where you can write in your journal. Take a few deep breaths to center yourself, open your gratitude journal or notebook, and bring to mind up to five things for which you feel grateful for from the day. It could be an interaction with a colleague or patient you cared for or something simple as what you had for lunch or a stranger's smile.

Here are nine additional tips to think about:

- 1) Be as specific as possible—specificity is key to fostering gratitude. "I'm grateful that my co-workers brought me soup when I was sick on Tuesday" will be more effective than "I'm grateful for my co-workers."

- 2) Go for depth over breadth. Elaborating in detail about a particular person or thing for which you're grateful carries more benefits than a superficial list of many things.
- 3) Get personal. Focusing on people to whom you are grateful has more of an impact than focusing on things for which you are grateful.
- 4) Try subtraction, not just addition. Consider what your life would be like without certain people or things, rather than just tallying up all the good stuff. Be grateful for the negative outcomes you avoided, escaped, prevented, or turned into something positive—try not to take that good fortune for granted.
- 5) See good things as “gifts.” Thinking of the good things in your life as gifts guards against taking them for granted. Try to relish and savor the gifts you've received.
- 6) Savor surprises. Try to record events that were unexpected or surprising, as these tend to elicit stronger levels of gratitude.
- 7) Revise if you repeat. Writing about some of the same people and things is OK, but zero in on a different aspect in detail.
- 8) Write regularly. Keep your gratitude journal open along with a pen in a conspicuous space as a reminder. Whether you write every other day or once a week, commit to a regular time to journal, then honor that commitment. But...
- 9) Don't overdo it. Evidence suggests writing occasionally (1-3 times per week) is more beneficial than daily journaling. That might be because we adapt to positive events and can soon become numb to them—that's why it helps to savor surprises.

POST-ACTIVITY REFLECTIONS

- What were some of the things that you reflected on that you felt grateful for?
- Did you find that the things you were grateful for were big moments or small moments or a mix of both?
- How was the act of writing down gratitude regularly different from just thinking about things you're grateful for? Was the act of writing helpful?
- What sensations and emotions came up for you as you wrote?
- How might doing this activity more frequently encourage gratitude for you going forward?

Action #4 | Savoring Walk

PLANNING FOR IT

While the Savoring Walk is a practice that you and colleagues can try by on your own, you can also make it a group activity.

Consider introducing this practice during an upcoming staff meeting, using the talking points below to encourage people to try the savoring walk before you all meet again. Then when you reconvene at the next meeting, invite them to share their experiences with it.

INTRODUCING IT

You can introduce this practice with the following talking points:

- I know we're all extremely busy, working hard from the moment we start our shifts until the time we're done. And when we're done, we often feel exhausted and have all kinds of additional demands on our time and energy.

- As a result, we often don't notice or acknowledge the pleasant and positive things around us. We may be in a rush, distracted by other thoughts, or busy checking our phones. That means we miss opportunities for positive experiences and positive emotions—the building blocks of long-term happiness and well-being.
- Research suggests we can deepen the benefits of the good things around us by consciously savoring them rather than letting them pass us by or taking them for granted.
- So, I'd like to suggest that we try an exercise called the Savoring Walk. It's designed to help us savor the good things around us, not by going to some exotic destination but by paying more careful attention to the sights, smells, and sounds we often overlook.
- Research has found that people who tried the savoring walk for a week reported greater happiness than people who just took normal walks for the week.
- At its root, this practice is all about fostering a grateful mindset: noticing, appreciating, and giving thanks for subtle pleasures in our life rather than just taking them for granted.
- Here's how to do it. [Move on to the How to Do It section below.]

HOW TO DO IT

Set aside 20 to 30 minutes of time to lead a team of nurses outdoors to a garden area or natural environment away from the rush and hum of work activity. Encourage participants to go off in different directions on a slow stroll through the area in silence.

Share these instructions with them before dispersing the group:

- As you walk, try to notice as many positive things around you as you can. These can be sights, sounds, smells, or other sensations.
- As you notice each of these positive things, acknowledge each one in your mind—don't just let them slip past you.
- Try to identify what it is about that thing that makes it pleasurable to you. Let the sensations around you conjure up feelings of gratitude for the gift of life and living that they represent.
- Explore ways that you can respond in gratitude, perhaps with a small or a silent return of positive thought directed at whom and what you see.

If you don't have time to lead this activity for a group during your workday, you can provide these instructions to your colleagues and encourage them to take a Savoring Walk on as many days as possible over the following week, then share their reflections with the group at a staff meeting next week.

POST-ACTIVITY REFLECTIONS

- What were some of the sights and sounds that you encountered on your walk that brought up positive feelings?
- What sensations and emotions came up for you?
- How might doing this activity encourage you to experience gratitude more frequently in the future?

Action #5 | Caregiving with Intention

PLANNING FOR IT

While the Caregiving with Intention practice is one that people perform individually, there are many ways that you can encourage colleagues to make this a group practice. As they commit in a group setting to performing this activity, and to sharing their experiences with it, they are more likely to follow through on it—and to reap greater benefits from it.

Consider discussing this practice—and its value to both individual and collective well-being—at an upcoming staff meeting. Department leaders might want to read the practice aloud to staff and invite them to engage in the practice as often as possible in the week ahead. Let them know that there will be time at the next staff meeting dedicated to sharing their experiences.

INTRODUCING IT

You can introduce this practice with the following talking points:

- We all know that time demands and high-stakes situations mean that many of us are running and under intense pressure all day.
- A moment to slow down with deep breaths and reflection can prepare us mentally and physiologically. Research has found that deep breaths calm the stress-driven sympathetic nervous system and activate the parasympathetic nervous system, which helps us bond with others.
- By taking these moments to ground ourselves, we can open ourselves up to experiencing gratitude for the meaningful moments and experiences that might otherwise just pass us by.
- Here's how to do it. [Move on to the How to Do It section below.]

HOW TO DO IT

- Take steps to slow down before each encounter with a patient.
- Take a few deep breaths and allow yourself the presence of mind to truly see and be with a patient's struggles.
- Greet the patient with a soft smile. With intentionality, thank the patient for allowing you to be involved in their lives at this important time.

POST-ACTIVITY REFLECTIONS

At your next staff meeting, ask people who tried Caregiving with Intention to share their experiences with it.

- Did it affect your interactions with a patient? How?
- How do you think it made the patient feel?
- Did the practice change the way you engaged with your colleagues? How?
- How did the experience stay with you beyond that encounter (or encounters)? Did it generate positive benefits that spilled over into other areas of your work or personal life?

Action #6 | Gratitude Huddle

PLANNING FOR IT

Set aside time for this activity at your next staff meeting or during an upcoming shift, and gather as a group. This is a great way to develop team connectivity and build a culture of gratitude within your team and organization.

Consider pairing this activity with Action #1 (Gratitude 123) as a way to express gratitude to other individuals on your team. When they share gratitude in the huddle for something that someone else did, encourage staff to: 1) describe what that other person did for them, 2) acknowledge the effort that was demonstrated, and 3) explain how the other person's actions helped or benefitted them.

INTRODUCING IT

You can introduce this practice with the following talking points:

- Throughout our workday, we experience moments, large and small, that make our day better. They could be moments when something went well during our shift, or a colleague helped us out, or we experienced something that made us feel good about being a nurse.
- But we don't often have the opportunity to acknowledge those moments or kind acts when they happen—we're just too busy.
- Yet we know from research that cultivating gratitude for the good things that happen in our lives and expressing gratitude, whether to another individual or acknowledging it within ourselves, has positive benefits for our health and well-being and for those around us.
- Cultivating gratitude, remembering it, savoring it, expressing it — it's all part of building a culture of gratitude around us. When people are part of a culture of gratitude in their organization, they feel better about their jobs.
- Past research has found that people are least likely to express gratitude at work than anywhere else. When our workplaces don't foster gratitude, they can become siloed, overly competitive, and lacking warmth and civility.
- So, we're creating space for our team to acknowledge the things that have happened in our work environment and during our workday that we are grateful for.
- Here's how to do it. [Move on to the How to Do It section below.]

HOW TO DO IT

- 1) Invite your team to stand in a circle or sit facing each other.
- 2) One at a time, as people feel so moved ("popcorn style" rather than going around in a circle), encourage each person to say out loud one thing that they are grateful for at work or one thing they appreciate about working with a colleague. It's helpful to keep the gratitude focused on work, to center gratitude in their shared environment.
- 3) When someone is thanked by a colleague, their response can be a simple, "You're welcome."
- 4) When silence seems to indicate that the group is finished, say, "We'll wait a couple more moments to see if there are any more sharers before we close the Gratitude Huddle for today." Often someone has been getting up the courage to speak and may come

forward at this time. Note that it isn't necessary that everyone participates every time you have a Gratitude Huddle or that everyone receives acknowledgement every time.

- 5) Close the practice by mentioning that we seldom get to know about these everyday moments of goodness or kindnesses because of the busyness of our work, but they are going on around us all the time. Acknowledging them helps us to remember to make time to offer our gratitude to each other.
- 6) With repeated practice of the Gratitude Huddle, encourage staff to write down gratitude they have experienced throughout the day so that they can share it in a future huddle or with the oncoming shift as a reflection of good things that happened that day.

POST-ACTIVITY REFLECTIONS

- How has this activity supported you in feeling more grateful about your workday or about your colleagues?
- What emotions came up for you as you were thinking about things to be grateful for?
- What emotions came up for you when you were on the receiving end of gratitude from another colleague?
- How could you use this practice to improve your well-being throughout the workday?

Action #7 | Gratitude Wall

PLANNING FOR IT

Materials needed

- Bulletin board or large poster paper and space to hang it
- Smaller colored paper or post-it notes
- Pens or markers
- Double-stick tape or thumbtacks

INTRODUCING IT

You can introduce this practice with the following talking points:

- Every day, we're surrounded by extraordinary people doing exceptional work, displaying tremendous care and kindness to others.
- But we don't often have the opportunity to acknowledge those kind acts—we're too busy, or they're too busy, or we don't have a way to tell them we noticed their actions without it seeming awkward.
- Yet we know from research that expressing gratitude for those kind acts has positive benefits for the person who gives and receives gratitude, and it strengthens connections between them. It can also have a ripple effect on those who witness expressions of gratitude exchanged by others.
- When people are part of a culture of gratitude in their organization, they feel better about their jobs. Yet past research has found that people are least likely to express gratitude at work than anywhere else.
- So, we're creating a way for our team to more publicly acknowledge the kind or selfless acts that they witness or experience. We're creating a Gratitude Wall.

- By giving our team the opportunity to reflect on and savor those moments and share them publicly with others, we want to amplify the positive experience and actually make ourselves more likely to notice them in the future.
- And public displays of gratitude are contagious! They often create a “surround sound” of gratitude expressions that multiply and begin to foster even more expressions of gratitude in the workplace.
- Here’s how to do it. [Move on to the How to Do It section below.]

HOW TO DO IT

Find a central space where other colleagues gather that would serve as a suitable location for your Gratitude Wall. This could be a public bulletin board or an empty wall where you can hang large blank paper. You might consider decorating the space with a design or backdrop that reflects the season—a large paper tree with leaves, a flower with petals, snowflakes on a snowy landscape.

Whatever the theme of your backdrop, create or offer a tray or folder of post-it-style notes nearby that could be added to the backdrop. People often cut out paper leaves and other shapes to serve as notes they can post. Keep in mind that not all post-it paper sticks well to walls, so you may want to offer double-stick tape or thumbtacks for adhering these shapes to your backdrop.

Include a set of instructions asking colleagues or visitors to write down on the notes one or more short expressions of gratitude that they’d like to share. Invite them to take a few quiet breaths as they reflect on a kind or selfless act that they witnessed or experienced before writing that down on their note and adding it to the gratitude wall. Don’t forget to keep pens and markers nearby.

Designate a time period for collecting the gratitude notes. You may want to consider a new gratitude wall, season by season or month by month. In this way, you can ensure that the gratitude wall stays “fresh” with new notes of gratitude. Make sure to let everyone know when the previous gratitude wall will be refreshed so that everyone has time to savor the gratitude notes that are there.

Find opportunities to bring your team or colleagues together in front of the gratitude wall for a few moments of group reflection on what has been posted there.

POST-ACTIVITY REFLECTIONS

- If you placed a gratitude note on the wall, what were some of the emotions you felt as you wrote it down?
- As you look at the wall, what emotions come up for you?
- How did having this wall change the way you looked at your colleagues, or thought about your own work? Do you think you were more likely to notice kind or generous acts?
- Did this activity encourage you to experience or express gratitude more often, even beyond writing it on the wall?

Action #8 | Heart and Soul of the Month

PLANNING FOR IT

The Heart and Soul of the Month activity is most effective if you can commit to doing it monthly for a whole year or at least for many months at a time. In this way, you allow opportunities for multiple individuals in your department or team to be featured for the positivity they contribute and to be appreciated by others.

It is a good idea to plan the nomination and acknowledgement process for this award in advance. Think through how you will solicit nominations and from whom, as well as who should make the decision about each month's awardee and how you'll feature them.

If you plan to highlight the awardee in a newsletter, how often is the newsletter shared and when will the next issue go out? Perhaps you want to feature them on a bulletin board or designated "appreciation" spot. If so, what makes a good location for this? If you want to feature the person on your intranet, is there someone else you need to work with to coordinate that?

INTRODUCING IT

You can introduce this practice with the following talking points:

- Every day, we're surrounded by extraordinary people doing exceptional work, displaying tremendous care and kindness to others and spreading positivity, warmth, and appreciation in all that they do.
- It's important to acknowledge those among us who help make our work environment and workday pleasant and whose generous spirit has uplifted us.
- To show our appreciation, we are instituting the Heart and Soul of the Month award. This award goes to one person each month who we want to acknowledge for their kindness and generosity.
- We'll acknowledge each month's awardee in our newsletter/intranet/appreciation wall with a photo and a short write-up about that individual and what makes them so special.
- Each month we'll be taking nominations for a new Heart and Soul of the Month awardee.
- Here's how to do it. [Move on to the How to Do It section below.]

HOW TO DO IT

Once you've decided on a plan for how you will nominate people for the Heart and Soul award, how you will arrive at a decision of who gets the award, and how you will publicize it, it's time to make it happen.

Start by announcing to your team or department that you're going to institute the monthly Heart and Soul of the Month award. Make the criteria for the award very clear and communicate it regularly, perhaps as a preface before each time you make a new award to someone. Be sure to consider various ways that people with different personalities might express the giving spirit (e.g., some may express themselves more quietly than others or do things "behind the scenes" that contribute to the positivity of the work environment. Don't forget to recognize them, too, and spread the recognition around to different individuals).

Designate an individual as the "Heart and Soul." On the first workday of the month, rally your department or team together in shouting out that month's Heart and Soul awardee. Make sure to express the special qualities that make this person wonderful. Offer a verbal or written note of

gratitude on behalf of the department or organization for the many ways this person exemplifies goodness and generosity.

Consider holding a small Heart and Soul reception to bring the team together to honor the awardee. And feature them in whatever special way you've decided to highlight them and their contributions throughout the month. Consider sharing their name and photo along with a short write-up about what makes them special and how they exemplify the giving spirit.

As the month goes on, make sure to continually encourage nominations for the next month's awardee.

POST-ACTIVITY REFLECTIONS

- What emotions come up for you when you think about nominating an individual as the Heart and Soul awardee?
- How did having this award change the way you looked at your colleagues, or how you go about your own work? Do you think it made you more likely to notice kind or generous acts?
- Did this activity encourage you to experience or express gratitude more often?

Take the Gratitude Challenge

EXPERIENCE THE POWER OF KEEPING A GRATITUDE JOURNAL, TOGETHER

We invite you and your colleagues to join a **Thnx4Nurses Gratitude Challenge** just for nurses on Thnx4.org!

Thnx4.org is an online, sharable journaling platform that helps you reflect upon and “say Thnx” for the goodness in your life.

Every other day, Thnx4.org will prompt you to post what you’ve felt grateful for or about, helping you notice and savor positive moments. You can keep your posts private, share them with the nursing community, or make them public to inspire widespread warmth and goodwill.



HOW IT WORKS

- The Gratitude Practice for Nurses campaign offers two opportunities to join with other nurses in a 21-day Thnx4Nurses Gratitude Challenge on Thnx4.org. The first challenge begins on June 10, 2021. The second challenge begins on November 4, 2021.
- Start by creating your account on Thnx4.org and joining the upcoming Thnx4Nurses group challenge.
- Two days before the start date of your Thnx4Nurses Gratitude Challenge, you’ll get a friendly reminder from Thnx4.
- Once your Thnx4Nurses Gratitude Challenge begins, you’ll get prompts every other day inviting you to journal your experiences and expressions of gratitude.
- Throughout the 21 days, you can track your activity and see how keeping a gratitude journal is associated with levels of happiness, social connection, and resilience to stress.

Facilitating a Gratitude Community of Practice

To promote a deeper practice of gratitude in your organization and make it part of your organizational culture, we encourage you to create a community of practice around gratitude. Below is some background information and guidelines for creating and sustaining such a community.

WHAT IS A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE?

According to researcher Etienne Wenger, “Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.”

Three Characteristics of a Community of Practice

1. **Domain:** Community members have a shared domain of interest, competence, and commitment that distinguishes them from others. This shared domain creates common ground, inspires members to participate, guides their learning, and gives meaning to their actions.
2. **Community:** Members pursue this interest through joint activities, discussions, problem-solving opportunities, information sharing and relationship building. The notion of a community creates the social fabric for enabling collective learning. A strong community fosters interaction and encourages a willingness to share ideas.
3. **Practice:** Community members are actual practitioners in this domain of interest and build a shared repertoire of resources and ideas they take back to their practice. While the domain provides the general area of interest for the community, the practice is the specific focus around which the community develops, shares, and maintains its core of collective knowledge.

PLANNING FOR IT

Before creating your community of practice, consider the above characteristics of what defines a community of practice and who you want to invite to join your community. You may want to form a community of nurse leaders who share common interests and experiences in motivating and overseeing nursing teams. Or you may want a community centering on a particular unit, team, or department within your organization. If you're working in a school or home care setting, you may want to gather nurse colleagues who work in a similar capacity to you to engage in a community of practice.

You'll want some way to convey when, where, and how long and how often the community of practice gatherings will take place and what the expectation is around making a commitment for regular attendance. In general, let invitees know that regular attendance is helpful for establishing consistency in the practice and connection among community members.

Here are some additional considerations to keep in mind:

- **Keep participation voluntary.** In order to create open, honest, and engaging dialogue, it is important your participants are joining because they feel as passionate about the topic as you do, not because it is a requirement.
- **Set a schedule, share it, and save space.** Keep meetings regular and share the meeting dates, times, and locations as far in advance as possible. This helps

participants set aside time to fully participate. Keep this schedule consistent—avoid rescheduling and make a commitment to your group meetings.

- **Share an agenda.** Make sure participants are aware of the topics on which you'll be focusing in each meeting. These could include: the power of writing a gratitude letter, the benefits of doing a savoring walk, how to do a gratitude meditation.
- **Keep the “homework” to a minimum.** Communities of practice are meant to be a comfortable space for sharing and practicing together in the moment. Too much extra preparatory or take-home work can make sessions feel stressful.

INTRODUCING IT

You can introduce your community of practice with the following talking points:

- As an organization/department/team, we're taking deliberate actions to cultivate a practice of gratitude in our workday and in our lives. This is to support our well-being while also building a culture of gratitude around us.
- For those of us who would like to deepen our gratitude practice by gathering regularly in a group to explore different gratitude exercises together, we're creating a gratitude community of practice.
- Our community of practice is open to anyone who wants to explore how they can infuse the benefits of gratitude into their work while also exploring how to spread the spirit of gratitude and appreciation within their organization/department/team. In essence, we're seeking people who would like to be gratitude champions—and receive support from an engaged community of their peers who are on a similar journey.
- The community of practice requires a certain level of commitment. To be part of it, we ask that you be willing to commit to regular attendance so we have consistency of participation and build stronger bonds within our group.
- Explain the features of the community of practice; when, where, and how long/how often the community of practice gatherings will take place; and what the expectation is around making a commitment for regular attendance. [Move on to the How to Do It section below.]

HOW TO DO IT

The following structure has been successfully implemented in communities of practice run through the Greater Good Science Center. We offer it here for your consideration as a way to structure each meeting within your own community of practice to build a reliable structure that participants can count on for each meeting.

- **Presentation:** The facilitator shares an overview of the session's topic, describes each step for the related practice, and reviews the science behind “why it works.”*
- **Small Group Breakouts:** We divide into smaller groups, where we try the practice together, supporting each other and sharing our experiences along the way.
- **Q&A:** We return to the full group to discuss how the practice felt for us, what questions came up, and how we might explore further.

* Refer to the source notes associated with each practice in the Gratitude Practice for Nurses Toolkit for Well-Being. Additional research is referenced in the Toolkit's slide deck notes.

POST-ACTIVITY REFLECTIONS

The following are some general questions that you might include as part of the regular community of practice meetings and discussions. Depending on the particular gratitude action or activity you decide to explore in your meetings, you may wish to refer to specific post-activity reflections from that exercise:

- How did this particular gratitude activity we practiced today impact you? What emotions did it bring up for you?
- How did this particular gratitude activity we practiced today change your feelings about your work environment or your colleagues?
- In what ways can you incorporate this gratitude activity into other areas of your life?
- How is being part of this community of practice shaping your ability to cultivate a deeper or more consistent practice of gratitude?

Thank You!

On behalf of the American Nurses Foundation and the Greater Good Science Center, we'd like to take this opportunity to thank YOU for adopting a practice of gratitude. We hope that you find this Implementation Guide to be a helpful tool in spreading the practice of gratitude among your colleagues, teams, and organizations, helping to build a culture of gratitude in all places where nurses provide care.

We'd love to hear more about your experiences with this guide and how it has served your gratitude practices. Please feel free to reach out via the contact links on the [Gratitude Practice for Nurses](#) landing page. Or you can email the Greater Good Science Center directly at greater@berkeley.edu with the subject line "Gratitude Implementation Guide."