

Overview of Nursing Theory

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(A concise, organized guide for students and practitioners)

1. What Is Nursing Theory?

Aspect	Description
Definition	A systematic set of concepts, definitions, relationships, and propositions that explain, predict, and guide nursing practice, education, and research. • Clarify the nature of nursing as a distinct discipline. • Provide a framework for clinical decision-making.
Purpose	• Direct curriculum development and research agendas. • Enhance communication among nurses, patients, and other health-care professionals.
Scope	Encompasses grand theories, middle-range theories, practice theories, and situational/phenomenological models.

2. Classification of Nursing Theories

Level	Characteristics	Example(s)
Grand (or Grand-Scale) Theories	• Broad, abstract, and global in scope. • Address the entire discipline of nursing. • Often difficult to test directly.	• Virginia Henderson – “Need Theory” • Dorothea Orem – “Self-Care Deficit Theory”
Middle-Range Theories	• More focused than grand theories. • Bridge the gap between abstract concepts and practical application. • Amenable to empirical testing.	• Kathryn Barnard – “Transcultural Nursing Theory” • Madeleine Leininger – “Culture Care Theory”

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Level	Characteristics	Example(s)
Practice (or Situation?Specific) Theories	• Highly specific to particular phenomena, populations, or settings. • Directly guide bedside interventions.	• Martha Rogers – “Science of Unitary Human Beings” (applied to critical care) • Patricia Benner – “Novice to Expert” (skill acquisition)
Conceptual/Phenomenological Models	• Describe experiences or processes without prescribing actions. • Often used in qualitative research.	• Jean Watson – “Human Caring Theory” (focus on caring moments)

3. Core Components of a Nursing Theory

1. **Concepts** – Fundamental ideas (e.g., health, environment, person).
2. **Definitions** – Precise meanings for each concept.
3. **Propositions/Relationships** – Statements that link concepts (e.g., “A supportive environment enhances patient self?care”).
4. **Assumptions** – Underlying beliefs about reality, human behavior, and nursing.
5. **Metaparadigm** – The four universal nursing concepts: **Person, Health, Environment, Nursing**.

4. Major Theoretical Paradigms

Paradigm	Philosophical Basis	Key Emphasis
Empiricist / Positivist	Objective reality, measurable phenomena.	Evidence?based practice, outcome evaluation.
Humanistic / Phenomenological	Subjective experience, meaning ?making.	Patient?centered care, therapeutic relationships.
Systems / Ecological	Interconnectedness of parts within a whole.	Holistic assessment, interdisciplinary collaboration.
Critical / Feminist	Power dynamics, social justice.	Advocacy, cultural competence, health equity.

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5. How Theories Influence Nursing Practice

Function	Example
Assessment	Leininger's cultural care model guides culturally sensitive data collection.
Planning	Orem's self-care deficit theory informs