HONING IN ON HOLISTIC

To the Editor:

The article “Integrative Holism in Psychiatric-Mental Health Nursing” by Zahourek (October 2008, Vol. 46, No. 10, pp. 31-37) provides insight into the importance of holistic practice. However, I would like to point out an area of potential confusion in the article. The distinction between integrative methods and holistic nursing is not clear enough. The author points out that “a PMH [psychiatric-mental health] nurse might use a complementary modality—thinking it is holistic—when in fact it is another medical intervention” (p. 33). This point is well taken but is not, in my opinion, carried out in the rest of the article.

As I read the article, I developed an increasing feeling of confusion between tools or therapeutic methods and holistic philosophy. The author defines holism as involving identification of “the interrelationships of the bio-psycho-social-spiritual dimensions in the person, recognizing that the whole is greater than the sum of these parts” (p. 33), and that “holism involves understanding the individual as a unitary whole in mutual process with the environment” (p. 33). So far, so good. However, the article then refers to manipulative and body-based treatment as holistic, in that they often involve recommended herbs and supplements, as well as provide hands-on treatment. The author is talking about combining two methods as if this in and of itself was holism. It is not. Holism is an entire philosophy, not just the application of certain tools.

The danger I see in parts of this article is that it could mislead practitioners into believing they are practicing holism when they are really applying integrative methods in a reductionist way. This tendency could encourage noncritical readers to miss the whole idea of holism.

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Response:

I much appreciate the letter reflecting very careful reading of my article. I am disappointed that one of my most important emphases was not sufficiently clear to the letter writer. The intent of the article was to present complementary-alternative-integrative practices and approaches for psychiatric-mental health (PMH) nurses and to compare and contrast those with the philosophy of holistic practice. The classification system and definitions of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) provided by the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine provide a convenient and useful organizational structure through which the basics of this growing specialty area can be presented and related to PMH. Similarly, the development of integrative medicine, which is not the same as CAM, has expanded the philosophical and theory base for many of the CAM modalities and has placed “interventions” in a much broader, more comprehensive, and, indeed, more holistic framework. However—and I really want to emphasize this—the legacy from holistic nursing, which is based on two conceptual frameworks of holism. The first is that people are greater than and different from the sum of their parts and that body-mind-spirit and environment are in continuous interaction. The second is that people are indivisible, unitary wholes in mutual process with others and the environment. Choosing one of these holistic frameworks provides the best approach for PMH nurses to explore and practice both allopathic and more complementary-alternative, or integrative, modalities, particularly in mental health.

I strongly believe CAM modalities do not make a practice “holistic”; similarly, a more al-
HORSES: SOURCES FOR HEALING

To the Editor:

I found the article “Equine-Facilitated Psychotherapy with Adult Female Survivors of Abuse” by Meinersmann, Bradberry, and Roberts (December 2008, Vol. 46, No. 12, pp. 36-42) issue to be educational, heartwarming, and inspiring. First, I would like to address the educational value I gained from this article. There have been several articles in journals regarding the value of alternative therapies in medicine, and alternative therapy practices have gained much more respect over the past few years. However, I have seen very few articles addressing alternative therapies in mental health.

As nurses, we learn the holistic approach in our basic nursing courses. Sometimes, we need a reminder of what the holistic approach is all about. The authors remind us of the holistic approach and, in addition, clearly show the effectiveness of equine-facilitated psychotherapy (EFP) and the importance of considering alternatives to traditional therapy. In addition, I very much appreciated the Web site address provided to locate credentialed providers of EFP. I went to this site and found two resources I will use for patients.

Most important, the researchers have clearly demonstrated the effectiveness of EFP for abused women. The women’s narrations of gaining self-confidence, gaining control, gaining independence, experiencing decreased feelings of depression, and relating with the horses was so very heartwarming.

I have found this article to be inspiring as I have for months desired an opportunity for volunteer work. I have to this point not found anything to motivate me. Now, I know where to volunteer. I am going to donate my time to an EFP facility. Thanks for the fantastic article.

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Letters to the Editor