Lead with C.A.R.E. and Jedi Wisdom: Silence Injustice, Nurses Will—With Purpose and Power

Shelitha R. Campbell, DNP, MSN, BSN, APRN, FNP-BC, PHN, HMCT
Rodney B. Campbell, BA
Carmen Ward-Sullivan, PhD, RN

Article

Abstract

As efforts to dismantle Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) frameworks intensify across political and institutional landscapes, the nursing profession is uniquely positioned to respond, not with retreat, but with reinvention. This article introduces the C.A.R.E. Framework: Capacity, Allyship, Resilience, and Equity, as a strategic and values-driven evolution of DEI, rooted in the ethical, holistic, and human-centered philosophy of nursing. Drawing on Jean Watson's Caring Science and Theory of Human Caring, the paper reaffirms nursing's longstanding commitment to justice, advocacy, and healing beyond the bedside. Through the lens of Caring Science, nurses are positioned as caregivers and as moral agents capable of confronting systemic inequities with compassion and clarity. This article explores the role of popular culture, specifically the moral philosophy of the *Star Wars* Jedi Order, as a narrative bridge to make DEI values more accessible and culturally resonant. By anchoring DEI within the language and practice of care, this work presents C.A.R.E. as a transformative framework that empowers nurses to lead with intention in polarized times, uphold the principles of social justice, and sustain the profession's legacy of inclusive advocacy. In a moment of ideological division, C.A.R.E. offers a cohesive, courageous path forward that affirms a shared humanitarian vision.

Key Words: CARE, Caring science, health equity, DEI, social justice, nurse leaders, Caritas

Reclaiming the Language of Justice

A growing movement, driven by ideology and backed by politics, seeks to dismantle Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives across various sectors. These actions, often hidden within policy debates, pose a deeper threat: the erosion of essential values like justice, access, and belonging. In healthcare, especially in nursing, this dismantling challenges core principles of the nursing code of ethics, including autonomy, beneficence, and nonmaleficence (American Nurses Association, 2025). The impacts of reducing DEI efforts go beyond current nursing practice; they also disrupt targeted grant support aimed at diversifying the nursing workforce. Such extreme measures to eliminate equitable programs raise vital ethical questions about how care is provided, who receives it, and who can deliver it.

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Although DEI has become politicized, its core mission remains crucial. A transformative framework aimed at ensuring representation, fairness, and belonging, DEI continues to provide tools to address health disparities, promote social justice, and enhance workforce diversity (Fields, et al., 2022; Kronebusch et al., 2022). As the shift of DEI from an aspirational concept to a politically charged term faces increasing scrutiny, opposition, and calls for elimination, nurse leaders must rethink their societal influence to rise above the ideological noise. By taking a leadership role in redefining the DEI conversation, nurses are uniquely positioned to expand the fundamental DEI mission through a model that is actionable, inclusive, and resilient.

This paper introduces the C.A.R.E. Framework: Capacity, Allyship, Resilience, and Equity, as an alternative model that emphasizes nursing values and empowers nurse leaders to promote health equity despite opposition. This framework offers a refreshed approach for fostering inclusive leadership and shaping the future of nursing through strategic, evidence-based actions that support vulnerable populations (National Academics of Science, Engineering, and Medicine, 2021; Rossillo et al., 2020).

Moreover, this paper leverages the power of popular culture—beliefs and values held by the general population—as a pedagogical tool to present DEI principles to diverse audiences in a more accessible and relatable way. The wisdom of the Jedi Order from the Star Wars universe will be used to illustrate how fundamental concepts of justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion align with the ethical and professional responsibilities of nursing. Just as the Jedi serve as guardians of balance and peace, nurses are the guardians of health justice, entrusted with the responsibility to protect, advocate, and care for all individuals, regardless of background (McDonald, 2024). These parallels highlight a shared commitment to compassion and integrity, emphasizing that in both nursing and Jedi philosophy, the highest form of care is grounded in the unwavering recognition of our shared humanity. By weaving together nursing science, social justice, and popular cultural narratives, this paper proposes a new path forward to build narrative bridges—one that both honors DEI's legacy and amplifies its mission through the power of care. In a time of division, C.A.R.E. becomes the language, philosophy, and strategy to unify and transform human caring.

The Nursing Workforce: A Call for Diversity and Representation

Nurses represent the largest segment of the healthcare workforce and often serve as the most consistent point of contact in patient care. This central role underscores the urgency of cultivating a nursing workforce that reflects the full spectrum of diversity within the populations it serves (Regis et. al, 2023). In response, national organizations such as the American Nurses Association (ANA) and the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) have emphasized the need for intentional strategies to diversify the profession, not only by race and ethnicity, but also by disability status, language proficiency, gender identity, and sexual orientation (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2017; American Nurses Association, 2019). A representative workforce strengthens the ability to provide culturally responsive, patient-centered care that honors the unique needs of all individuals.

Despite these efforts, the nursing workforce remains overwhelmingly homogenous. As of 2023, 80.6% of registered nurses identified as white, while only 6.3% identified as Black or African American, 7.2% as Asian, 5.6% as Hispanic or Latino, and less than 1% as American Indian or Alaska Native (AACN, 2024). There is limited national data on disability status, LGBTQ+ identity, or primary language among nurses, making the gaps in representation within these communities even more difficult to address. This disparity reflects a broader issue of underrepresentation across multiple dimensions of identity in a profession tasked with addressing the healthcare needs of an increasingly diverse and intersectional patient population.

For individuals from underrepresented communities, becoming a nurse offers a transformative opportunity for economic stability while serving populations often marginalized by the healthcare system. Historically, efforts to boost nursing workforce diversity have been led by federally funded programs like those supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). HRSA initiatives have been crucial in expanding access to nursing education. According to the Nursing Workforce Diversity grant program report from 2014–2019, 79% of HRSA-supported nursing trainees came from disadvantaged backgrounds, and 56% identified as underrepresented minorities (HRSA, 2025). The distribution of such competitive grants for nursing training programs has helped provide scholarships, mentorship, and financial support to nursing students, aiming to ease financial burdens, promote academic excellence, and create pathways to high-paying careers in healthcare (Holt et al., 2023).

Prioritizing workforce diversity isn't just about representation; at its core, it's a vital step toward ensuring fair healthcare outcomes for everyone. It's an ethical, clinical, and cultural necessity. Nurses who share lived experiences with their patients are better positioned to understand cultural subtleties, enhance engagement, and foster trust. For 23 consecutive years, nursing has been ranked as the most trusted profession in the U.S. (Saad, 2025). Sustaining and growing that trust requires more inclusion and equity in who becomes a nurse and how nursing is taught and practiced. By cultivating a diverse workforce committed to holistic care principles, the nursing profession can ensure that every patient receives personalized, compassionate attention that improves quality care and results. The C.A.R.E. Framework acts as a guiding model for advancing workforce diversity, tackling humanitarian issues, and promoting health equity through nursing leadership.

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The Philosophy and Power of C.A.R.E.

To understand the urgency and relevance of C.A.R.E., we must first revisit the foundational philosophy of nursing, a discipline deeply rooted in the science and art of caring for the whole person rather than simply treating a diagnosis. Grounded in a holistic philosophy, nursing integrates emotional, spiritual, social, and physical aspects of health. Jean Watson's Theory of Human Caring and Caring Science offer a compelling framework for this understanding (Watson, 1997; Watson, 2008). Watson emphasizes that caring is the essence of nursing and positions it as both a moral ideal and a scientific discipline. Her theory challenges nurses to move beyond task-oriented care and embrace a transpersonal relationship that honors human dignity and promotes healing. Leading with humanitarian values requires nurses to meet individuals where they are to provide the appropriate level of care in each moment of need. Within this paradigm, nurses are encouraged to engage in Caritas Processes®, which reflect intentional presence, authentic connection, and moral commitment to those they serve (Anderson, 2023; Watson, 2008).

The integration of Caring Science is especially relevant when advocating for individuals within potentially structurally biased systems. Acts of compassion, culturally attuned care, and advocacy become not only professional obligations but sacred practices of justice and healing. The Caritas Processes® align the humanitarian nursing practice by calling for an ethical commitment to reduce suffering through the provision of loving kindness for self and others. By cultivating human-to-human connections that transcend the clinical encounter, nurses using Caring Science as a guide can confront systemic inequities and help restore wholeness at both individual and collective levels. As Watson affirms, nursing is about creating healing environments that foster love, trust, and hope through intentional and compassionate care (Watson, 1997; Watson, 2008).

Watson's Caring Science aligns perfectly with the C.A.R.E. Framework, providing philosophical and theoretical support for an actionable structure that enhances ethical decision-making, clinical practice, and advocacy (Watson, 2008). C.A.R.E. represents a strategic evolution that embeds DEI principles at the moral and spiritual core of nursing. Each element of C.A.R.E. is infused with the Caritas ethos of honoring humanity, creating meaning, and embracing inclusive care. As healthcare becomes more complex and politicized, the C.A.R.E. Framework offers a values-driven approach to promoting inclusive access, safeguarding vulnerable populations, and building empowered networks that influence systems and policies. In this way, C.A.R.E. is not just a framework but embodies a caring philosophy that is timeless, transformative, and urgently needed.

The C.A.R.E. Framework: A Guiding Principle for Nursing Leadership

The pillars of C.A.R.E., Capacity, Allyship, Resilience, and Equity, are each powerful on their own, but when combined into a single framework, they create a complete guide for ethical, compassionate, and transformational nursing leadership. More than just a theoretical idea, C.A.R.E. is a dynamic, action-focused model that prepares nurses to lead with intention and purpose in academic, clinical, professional, and policy areas.

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Rooted in the ethical principles of Watson's Caring Science and the Theory of Human Caring, the C.A.R.E. Framework connects professional practice with social justice, highlighting advocacy, compassion, and healing at both the individual and system levels. Incorporating the Caritas Processes® offers a strong theoretical base, enabling nurses to put core values into action in ways that foster meaningful, person-centered changes.

By defining each pillar through a structured approach—acronym, definition, action statement, nursing execution, and community elevation—the C.A.R.E. Framework offers a practical design for implementation that is rooted in relational ethics and human-to-human connection. It serves not only as a roadmap for practice, but as a call to lead with empathy, equity, and intentional presence in all dimensions of care.

C - Capacity: Building Knowledge and Competence

Action: *Develop intentional growth and self-determination.*

- Nurse Execution: Capacity begins with nurses embracing a deep sense of purpose grounded in loving-kindness, presence, and trust. Nurses build capacity through lifelong learning, cultural humility, and justice-informed professional development. The integration of holistic knowing, reflective practice, and intentional caring relationships is essential. Creativity and all ways of knowing—empirical, aesthetic, ethical, and personal—are used in the caring process to foster growth and transformation.

- Community Elevation: Capacity-building in the community involves mentoring, education, and empowering individuals to advocate for their health. Nurses create trusting relationships through meaningful teaching-learning encounters that address the whole person and inspire self-efficacy and agency.

A - Allyship: Standing in Solidarity

Action: *Foster supportive and diverse relationships.*

- Nurse Execution: Allyship is rooted in faith, hope, and the honoring of others' lived experiences. Nurses nurture trust by respecting individual belief systems and offering a compassionate, nonjudgmental presence. Practicing authentic relationship-building helps nurses recognize and challenge systemic injustice, serving as intentional advocates for historically excluded communities.

- Community Elevation: In communities, allyship is strengthened through partnerships, inclusive coalitions, and healing environments that promote belonging. Nurses attend to the emotional and spiritual needs of those they serve by fostering safe spaces for voice, agency, and restoration.

R - Resilience: Powering Through Adversity

Action: *Promote adaptability and well-being as a lifestyle.*

- Nurse Execution: Resilience is cultivated through intentional self-care, emotional intelligence, and presence. Nurses support the expression of both positive and negative emotions transforming adversity through a balance of inner strength and a spiritual connection to purpose. Creativity and openness are key elements in navigating challenges and sustaining care in complex environments.

- Community Elevation: Community resilience is nurtured through programs that support trauma healing, forgiveness, collective well-being, and ministering through sacred acts. Nurses co-create environments that honor vulnerability and foster transformation—spaces where healing and miracles are possible.

E - Equity: Ensuring Fair Access to Care

Action: *Advance social justice and mutual respect.*

- Nurse Execution: Equity is foundational to ethical nursing. It calls nurses to lead with compassion, recognize the dignity in every person, and advocate for systemic change. By addressing individual needs through an inclusive and caring lens, nurses dismantle barriers and promote justice in every interaction.

- Community Elevation: Equity within communities is sustained by addressing structural determinants of health and supporting public policies that prioritize vulnerable populations. Nurses engage in authentic learning partnerships with the people they serve by cultivating understanding, deepening connections, and co-designing solutions that reflect shared humanity and the possibility of transformation.

The Shift from DEI to C.A.R.E.: An Evolution, Not an Escape

In an era where DEI is increasingly targeted as a political wedge, nursing's charge is to reclaim and reframe its core values without diluting them. C.A.R.E. does just that; it shifts the conversation from controversy to compassion, and from rhetoric to action. Where some see DEI as partisan, C.A.R.E. is grounded in the universally understood principles of care, emphasizing patient rights, doing good, avoiding harm, and ensuring fair treatment, which are all critical elements to develop a humanitarian mindset.

A strategic evolution from DEI to C.A.R.E. does not abandon the objectives of DEI but operationalizes them within a professional framework that resonates with nursing's history and mission. In practice, nurses embody C.A.R.E. from advocating for marginalized patients to sustaining resilience during crisis. C.A.R.E. upholds the non-negotiable principles of holistic, culturally responsive nursing care, positioning inclusion and equity as core competencies rather than ideological mandates (Freborg & Chalmers, 2024). Formalizing this framework allows for more precise alignment and strengthened advocacy.

Nurses are uniquely positioned to lead with an ethos of care that transcends political divides. By positioning the C.A.R.E. Framework as a professional commitment rather than a political declaration, nurses are able drive systemic transformational change. C.A.R.E. provides a strategic, person-centered approach that safeguards the foundational values of DEI while translating them into language that resonates across diverse communities. This shift represents a form of resistance through compassion, a steady yet powerful movement rooted in holistic care, social justice, and advocacy (Crenshaw et al., 2025).

Nursing as Inquiry, Advocacy, and Action

Nurses are scientists, healers, and truth-seekers. As a discipline, nursing has long embraced an inquiry-driven model of care, one that emphasizes critical thinking, reflection, and evidence-based action. At their core, nurses are also advocates, tasked not only with asking essential questions but with responding through meaningful service to those most affected by injustice. With deep-rooted curiosity and a dedication to community well-being, nurses pursue action-oriented solutions that promote health equity and better outcomes. This inquisitive approach to understanding the human condition fuels transformative care. Guided by the C.A.R.E. Framework, this process of inquiry is directed by key reflective questions:

- How did this health disparity emerge?

- How can sustainable solutions be implemented?

- How will this intervention make a tangible difference?

- How does equitable policy impact health outcomes?

These queries are not mere hypotheticals; they are urgent priorities. The C.A.R.E. Framework provides a comprehensive approach for nurses to critically analyze the root causes of inequality while equipping themselves with practical strategies for change. C.A.R.E. emphasizes that care is influenced by personal, communal, and societal experiences, guiding nurses to operate at the intersection of empathy and systemic change. To meet the changing demands of care, nurses' roles must remain adaptable, evolving to suit different environments and shifting needs. At their best, nurses serve as flexible changemakers within complex systems, easily transitioning from caregiver to advocate, witness to defender, and practitioner to leader in the ongoing fight for justice. Additionally, as the language of equity becomes more politicized, adaptability is crucial for engaging diverse audiences without compromising ethical principles. Cultural translation tools, like the Jedi narrative, can help foster meaningful humanitarian connections across generations, disciplines, and belief systems.

The Popular Culture Lens: Jedi Wisdom in Nursing Practice

Storytelling has long been a powerful tool for shaping societal values, encouraging critical thinking, and driving social change. From literature to film, stories influence public awareness, offfering pathways for reflection, advocacy, and resistance against oppression (**OLGA**Willby, 2011). In today's society, popular culture acts as an accessible and influential platform for fostering discussions about justice and equity, both within and outside of healthcare and nursing. The connection between popular culture and social justice creates a strong opportunity to bridge ideological gaps and engage diverse audiences—whether skeptical, curious, or committed—in conversations about justice and equity. By utilizing widely recognized figures—such as Yoda from Star Wars—along with the principles of JEDI (Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion), nurse leaders can harness storytelling as a strategic approach to reframe equity issues in ways that are familiar and compelling.

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Just as nurses are bound by the principles of care, the Jedi of the Star Wars universe embody an ethos of resilience, allyship, and justice. The Jedi Code, *"There is no emotion, there is peace. There is no ignorance, there is knowledge. There is no passion, there is serenity. There is no chaos, there is harmony. There is no death, there is the Force,"* much like the nursing code of ethics, prioritizes humanity and the equity pursuit, by rising against barriers (Lucas, 1977). Beyond the nostalgic appeal, the Jedi archetype also embodies a humanitarian ethic. The Jedi, as a guardian of peace through wisdom, and the protection of the vulnerable, mirrors the moral courage required in nursing leadership today. The popular culture influence has built a societal narrative demonstrating an alternative representation of JEDI: Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion:

- **Justice**: Jedi protect peace and fairness, as nurses protect equitable care for all.

- **Equity**: Jedi restore balance; nurses address disparities and social determinants.

- **Diversity**: The Jedi Order includes beings of all backgrounds; nursing seeks a workforce reflective of the people it serves.

- **Inclusion**: Jedi stand for all beings; nurses advocate for inclusive, person-centered care.

By drawing on the wisdom of the Jedi, nurses can amplify their role as protectors of justice, guardians of health, and agents of change in an ever-evolving healthcare landscape. Within the intersection of nursing, justice, and popular culture, it is evident that the C.A.R.E. framework is not just limited to nursing principles; it is a universal model for nurse leaders to advocate with transformative action.

The values of the Jedi Order provide a compelling framework for examining and inspiring nursing leadership. The Jedi's practice of mindfulness and emotional regulation aligns with Jean Watson's Theory of Human Caring, which emphasizes a nurse's ability to stay emotionally attuned, present, and compassionate toward oneself and others, especially in times of suffering (Watson, 1997). The Jedi commitment to justice reflects the ethical duty within nursing to advocate for equity and break down structural barriers, a responsibility outlined in the core leadership competencies of the AACN (2021) and AONL (2015). The Jedi tradition of lifelong mentorship mirrors Patricia Benner's *Novice to Expert* theory, highlighting the importance of experiential learning, knowledge sharing, and leadership growth in nursing practice (Benner, 1984). By drawing these connections, the C.A.R.E. Framework becomes both a philosophical and practical guide for nurses to lead efforts in building capacity, fostering allyship, resilience, and advancing equity during a time of societal division.

The C.A.R.E. Framework, like the Jedi philosophy, urges leaders to act with wisdom, courage, and unwavering dedication to justice. It is not just a response to the challenges facing DEI; it is a strategic evolution that turns divisive debates into opportunities for engagement and positive change. Through C.A.R.E., nurses can embody the core virtues that both DEI and the Jedi represent, ensuring healthcare remains a force for justice, healing, and inclusivity. C.A.R.E. enhances the clinical reputation of the nursing profession and highlights the humanitarian mission that demands courage, compassion, and collective responsibility in addressing systemic harm and promoting equity.

Conclusion: A Call to Lead with C.A.R.E.

The dismantling of DEI is not the end of the movement toward justice; it is a crucial moment that requires strength. A key point where the voices of nurse leaders need to be raised. Fundamentally, nursing is social justice in action—a profession founded on the ethical duty to care for others, promote healing in mind, body, and spirit, and advocate for those in need. Nurses have always been at the forefront of systemic change, whether in policy reform, leadership roles, health equity, or patient advocacy. Yet, in today's changing socio-political environment, nurses must face this critical time with courage, clarity, and compassion to address burgeoning humanitarian issues.

The C.A.R.E. Framework empowers nurse leaders to meet this challenge, ensuring that diversity, equity, and inclusion remain central to professional practice and community support. Prioritizing C.A.R.E. as a forward-thinking model with a humanitarian perspective redefines advocacy through actionable strategies instead of engaging in ideological battles. This approach is an evolution. Nurses must look beyond societal divisions and realize that their collective strength comes from their natural ability to lead with curiosity and a commitment to equity.

Being a nurse is like having a special superpower—the ability to care with intention. C.A.R.E. is more than just a framework; it embodies the core of nursing itself. Through Capacity, Allyship, Resilience, and Equity, nurses gain essential tools to break down disparities, challenge systemic oppression, and fight for fair and equitable healthcare for everyone. The skills to listen, heal, and stand in solidarity with those in need are what make nursing a profession that leads through action. By applying C.A.R.E., nurse leaders become powerful agents of lasting change, making justice and health equity real in every clinical setting, academic institution, and policy discussion. C.A.R.E. respects the roots of nursing while paving the way forward. Incorporating C.A.R.E. into practice allows nurse leaders to serve as cultural guides, advocates, and champions of justice.

Through the lens of popular culture, there is a unique opportunity to reimagine the societal impacts of DEI. The *Star Wars* saga, especially the guiding principles of the Jedi Order, provides an artistic framework for individuals to reflect on the realization of humanity. Similar to ethical nursing and social justice movements, the Jedi Code is based on C.A.R.E. for vulnerable populations. As guardians of balance, the Jedi are responsible for maintaining harmony, a goal that reflects the core objectives of DEI. Like the Jedi, nurses also encounter ethical dilemmas, creating opportunities for introspection, dialogue, and growth.

This work begins by reclaiming the language of justice. It concludes with a reaffirmation that care is not neutral; it is revolutionary. By choosing to C.A.R.E., nurse leaders actively oppose apathy and inequality, opting instead for a path of intentional healing and transformative advocacy. In the words of Yoda: "Do or do not, there is no try." Let us choose to do; with courage, with justice, and with C.A.R.E.

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Authors

Shelitha R. Campbell, DNP, MSN, BSN, APRN, FNP-BC, PHN, HMCT
Email: Shelitha.Campbell@gmail.com
ORCID ID: 0009-0001-5692-4021

Dr. Shelitha R. Campbell is a nurse practitioner, professor, entrepreneur, HeartMath Certified Trainer, and a Watson Caring Science Institute Caritas Coach student whose work centers on health equity, trauma-informed care, and culturally responsive leadership. With experience in clinical practice, academia, community engagement, and executive leadership, her work bridges academia and activism. As the founder of the C.A.R.E. Framework, Dr. Campbell leads initiatives at the intersection of nursing, social justice, and health policy. Dr. Campbell has presented nationally on nursing innovation, policy reform, and human trafficking awareness. Her scholarship centers on empowering nurses as catalysts for equity-centered transformation.

Rodney B. Campbell, BA
Email: smirk.media4@gmail.com
ORCID-ID: 0009-0007-9075-5026

Rodney B. Campbell is the Founder and CEO of DopeOnly/Smirk Media, a branding and storytelling platform that centers Black identity, expression, and empowerment. With a background in creative writing and community advocacy, his work explores the intersection of culture, justice, and narrative power. He has developed multimedia campaigns to elevate marginalized voices and promote systemic change. In this manuscript, Campbell brings a philosophical lens, integrating pop culture and Star Wars metaphors to amplify the message of equity and collective healing. His contributions reflect a commitment to accessible, culturally grounded dialogue that challenges conventional thinking and invites new perspectives.

Carmen Ward-Sullivan, PhD, RN
Email: crstncarm@gmail.com
ORCID-ID: 0009-0003-0488-697X

Dr. Carmen Ward-Sullivan is an executive nurse leader, researcher, and educator with 40 years of experience spanning clinical practice and academic nursing. She serves as the Associate Dean for Pre-Licensure/Undergraduate Programs at Samuel Merritt University, College of Nursing. As a student of the Watson Caring Science Institute, Dr. Ward-Sullivan integrates Jean Watson's Caritas Processes into her teaching, research, and leadership, emphasizing equity, healing, holistic, and global health care initiatives.

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