Caring is the foundation of nursing knowledge and nursing practice. It is a moral ideal involving commitment, knowledge, and action. To study nursing is to study caring, which includes growing in understanding of ‘self’ and ‘other’ from the perspective of a caring person and becoming committed to the value of caring and to the health and wholeness of the persons being nursed. Although it is clear that the central core of nursing education should not be limited to one’s ability to care for but should also be driven by one’s ability to care about, what is not clear are the processes used by nurse educators to overcome the pressure to focus solely on teaching caring for in order to integrate caring about in their teaching.

The purpose of the study is to use a constructivist grounded theory approach to explore undergraduate nurse educators’ perspectives on how they teach caring about while teaching caring for to nursing students, and the challenges and opportunities within their experiences. The tripartite integrated research question of this study is: How do nurse educators define the concepts of caring about and caring for, how do they teach caring about while teaching caring for, and what are the challenges and opportunities in teaching these concepts?

The researcher conducted 15 in-depth individual interviews. Constructivist grounded theory strategies were used to develop an inductive theory of the process of teaching caring concepts that is grounded in the nurse educators’ perspectives. The framework, entitled “Teaching caring as a multidimensional phenomenon”, was the social-cognitive process that emerged from the data of this study. This teaching process included four concepts: conceptualizing the meaning of caring concepts, recognizing the teachable moment, seizing and acting on the teachable moment, and facing and dealing with challenges. The findings demonstrate that the process of teaching caring as a multidimensional phenomenon involve teaching engagement continuum, which includes connecting or engaging. These continuous processes include formal and informal approaches of teaching that involve critical thinking and emotional intelligence skills. Key implications related to theory, research, and nursing education are identified, particularly related to expanding nurse educators’ understanding of both concepts, and testing and using the explicit process of teaching caring as a multidimensional phenomenon.