



Chapter 1

CARE AND COMPASSION IN NURSING

Care Skills for Nurses, First Edition. Claire Boyd

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LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this chapter you will have an understanding of the meaning of care and compassion in nursing.

The reasons that individuals cite for wanting to work in the healthcare setting are numerous and varied. Personally, I went into nursing because I wanted to do some good: to help people. The biggest compliment I was ever paid in my nursing career was when a relative visiting her father told me that she wanted to go into nursing after watching me work on the ward and wanted to be ‘just like you – kind and caring’. However, visiting the wards in many different hospitals, and in community care homes, it seems that ‘kindness’ may often be in short supply.



GLOSSARY

Compassion

A feeling of distress and pity for the suffering or misfortune of others. This often includes the desire to alleviate it.

It is true that nursing has been through many changes: not always all for the good. We have all seen the headlines citing lapses in basic care and how today’s nurses ‘have lost their compassion’. It seems that nursing is receiving a bad press at present and, although it shames me to say this, it is not always unjustified. This has prompted the Royal College of Nursing to launch a campaign, This is Nursing, to show the ‘skill and compassion’ of today’s nurses, as well as to explore the reasons behind failures in care (Royal College of Nursing 2012). This campaign, developed jointly by the Royal College of Nursing, the Nursing and Midwifery Council and the Department of Health, has produced the Principles of Nursing Practice (Royal College of Nursing 2010), which tell us what patients, colleagues, families and carers can expect from nursing. These principles are reproduced in Table 1.1.

The Department of Health and the NHS Commissioning Board (2012) have developed a consultation/discussion paper entitled ‘Developing the culture of compassionate care: creating a new vision for nurses, midwives and care-givers’ to emphasise values and behaviours that apply in the NHS, public health and social care (Box 1.1).

Table 1.1 The Principles of Nursing Practice

A	Nurses and nursing staff treat everyone in their care with dignity and humanity – they understand their individual needs, show compassion and sensitivity, and provide care in a way that respects all people equally.
B	Nurses and nursing staff take responsibility for the care they provide and answer for their own judgements and actions – they carry out these actions in a way that is agreed with their patients, and their families and carers of their patients, and in a way that meets the requirements of their professional bodies and the law.
C	Nurses and nursing staff manage risk, are vigilant about risk, and help to keep everyone safe in the places they receive health care.
D	Nurses and nursing staff provide and promote care that puts people at the centre, involves patients, service users, their families and their carers in decisions and helps them make informed choices about their treatment and care.
E	Nurses and nursing staff are at the heart of the communication process: they assess, record and report on treatment and care, handle information sensitively and confidentially, deal with complaints effectively, and are conscientious in reporting the things they are concerned about.
F	Nurses and nursing staff have an up-to-date knowledge and skills, and use these with intelligence, insight and understanding in line with the needs of each individual in their care.
G	Nurses and nursing staff work closely with their own team and with other professionals, making sure patients' care and treatment is co-ordinated, is of a high standard and has the best possible outcome.
H	Nurses and nursing staff lead by example, develop themselves and other staff, and influence the way care is given in a manner that is open and responds to individual needs.

Permission kindly agreed by Royal College of Nursing. From Royal College of Nursing (2010).

Box 1.1 Culture of compassionate care

Care
Compassion
Competence
Communication
Courage
Commitment

Source: Department of Health and NHS Commissioning Board (2012).



GLOSSARY

Steroid-induced psychosis

A common side effect of the use of any corticosteroid, such as prednisolone. An individual may experience feelings of elation, euphoria and/or extreme mania, delusions of grandeur, hallucinations, general disorientation or psychotic behaviour.

In short, we need to pull our socks up and get back to the basics. Care and compassion are the two central themes of this book. Personally I do not believe that compassion can be taught, but there may be times when we should be reminded of this central ethos and the privileged position that we have when caring for others. I do believe firmly, however, that care and compassion still exist in the healthcare setting, but that they may need a bit of prompting to show themselves; hence the Department of Health, Royal College of Nursing and Nursing and Midwifery Council initiatives.

Always remember: it could be us on the receiving end of care, or one of our loved ones. How would we like to be treated and how would we like our loved ones to be treated? I have been privileged to care for many wonderful people, ranging from those new to the world to those taking their very last breath. For all my patients and service users (people cared for in the community setting) I always strived to provide the very best care with kindness, care and compassion.

Now, let's remove the rose-tinted glasses: some patients may be difficult to care for; they may be confused, frightened or aggressive due to their medical condition. They may be 'under the influence' of drugs or drink and not acting rationally. I've had chairs thrown at me due to 'steroid-induced psychosis' and there were times when I had to remember that my patient was 'ill'. Some patients may just be naturally aggressive, but all patients must be treated with respect and dignity.

Let's look at the case study in Activity 1.1. How much care and compassion has been shown to this patient?

In 2011 The Patients Association (a charitable organisation that aims to tackle poor care and its causes; www.patients-association.com) published a report entitled 'We've been listening, have you been learning?'. It gave the most common complaints received by The Patients Association from patients.



Activity 1.1 Care and compassion exercise

Sarah Matthews was admitted to your clinical area this morning after falling down the stairs. She requires metal fixation surgery to her right tibia and fibula complex fractures. She is on bed rest. All her vital signs are within normal parameters, although her pulse rate is high at 90 beats per minute. She tells you she is in pain and has not had a cigarette 'for ages' and that she is 'gasping for a ciggie'. You are very busy seeing to another patient when Sarah shouts out that she needs the commode urgently. You tell her you are too busy. When you finish what you are doing you go to Sarah and see that she has 'wet herself'. You tut at her and say that she will have to wait to be cleaned up. Sarah starts to cry.

Look at the case study above. What are Sarah's nursing care needs? How you would address them? What aspects were left wanting in the scenario outlined in the case study? Do you think that Sarah was treated with care and compassion?



Activity 1.2

List what you think might be the four most frequent complaints received by The Patients Association from patients about their health care.

It is true to say that reports of poor care seem to dominate the media at present, and in many cases care standards are not being met. However, it is also true that the overwhelming majority of staff working in the care system are skilled and hard-working. But we do need to learn from our mistakes in order to raise standards.

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

- 1 Name the six components of the culture of compassionate care.

KEY POINTS

- Care and compassion in nursing.
- The culture of compassionate care.
- The principles of nursing practice.

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