The quivering of the heart: cultivating compassion in healthcare

Create Act Change
International Digital Storytelling Conference
Hacettepe University
Ankara, Turkey

Pip Hardy
10th May 2013

What if all the people who could not sleep went to the parks?
What if they all went there to create or to finish stories?
What if they all went there to tell their stories?
What if hundreds, thousands, millions went in their solitude like a stream and each told their story?
What if there were old women fearful if they slept they would die and young women unable to conceive and husbands having affairs and children fearful of failing and fathers worried about paying bills and men having business troubles and women unlucky in love and those that were in physical pain and those who were guilty?
What if they all left their houses like a stream and the moon illuminated their way and they came, each one to tell their stories?

Would these be the more troubled of humanity?
Or would these be the passionate of this world or those who need to create to live or would these be the lonely ones?

And I ask you if they all came to the parks at night and told their stories would the sun on rising be more radiant and again I ask you would they embrace?

- Lawrence Tarnauer

Relieving suffering

Healthcare: Science or art?

Science: the dominant paradigm

- 'conventional' (western) medicine or 'alternative' medicine?
- logic and reason or intuition?
- statistics or stories?
- quantity or quality?
- technical skill or compassion?
Compassion: what is it?

1. How would you define compassion?
2. Describe a compassionate act – either given or received by you.
3. How did that feel?

‘The quivering of the heart in the face of sorrow, pain or suffering.’

Jack Kornfield

Finding compassion in unexpected places

Night shift

www.patientvoices.org.uk/flv/0685pv384.htm

How to make it happen?

• Legislation?
• Regulation?
• Policies?
• Targets?
• Training for nurses?
• Training for managers?
• Training for leaders?
• The 6 Cs?
Ways of knowing

- Empirical knowing
- Aesthetic knowing
- Personal knowing
- Ethical knowing

Carper 1978

Cultivating compassion

Creating the right conditions:
- Preparing the ground
- Sowing the seeds
- Nurturing the plants

Preparing the ground

- becoming more aware
- noticing the nature of suffering
- accepting ourselves
- being kind to ourselves
- recognising our interconnectedness

Ubuntu: the essence of being human

"The solitary human being is a contradiction in terms and therefore you seek to work for the common good because your humanity comes into its own in belonging."

Archbishop Desmond Tutu

Sowing seeds

- cultivating skilful action
- developing wisdom
- offering kindness
- relieving suffering
- sharing joy
- practising equanimity

Nurturing the seeds

Making and taking time
- time to notice
- time to care
- time to listen
- time to breathe
- time to ‘just be’
Susan’s story

Only connect
www.patientvoices.org.uk/flv/0690pv384.htm

Creating the right conditions

Creating space
• temenos (sacred space)
• creative listening
• story circles

Digital storytelling as compassion practice

Empathy: a scientific approach

‘Mirror neurons enable us to feel the emotions, movements and intentions of others: they facilitate a kind of natural empathy, part of the social brain that connects us intimately in every human encounter.’
Kornfield 2008

Empathy: an artistic approach

‘Telling, sharing and hearing stories is another way of crossing the boundaries of consciousness, opening our hearts and cultivating compassion for all beings as if they were part of our family.’
Kornfield 2008
Wee Haan's story

Can I have a hand, please?
www.patientvoices.org.uk/flv/0262pv384.htm

Facing our dragons

‘No matter what form
the dragon may take, it
is of this mysterious
passage past him, or
into his jaws, that
stories of any depth
will always be
concerned to tell....’
O'Connor 1969

Transformation

‘People reach greater
maturity as they find the
freedom to be
themselves and to claim,
accept and love their
own personal story, with
all its brokenness and its
beauty.’
Vanier 2004

The stories are all one

‘Each affects the other
and the other affects
the next and the world
is full of stories and the
stories are all one.’
Albom 2004

Thank you.

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