Concept Analysis - Compassion in Nursing

Identification of a Concept

There is a growing concern within public and policy domains that the fundamental elements of health care are lacking, leading to poor patient experience, poor clinical outcomes, and at times, catastrophic outcomes. Reports from the Health Ombudsman and the Patient’s Association present the stories of patients who have experienced inadequate, poor, and at times, frightening experiences, and above what is considered in NHS and other care settings. There and recent reports and directives from the government imply that the missing ingredient is compassion. Yet there is no clear description of what compassion in this context looks like and very little evidence to suggest that compassion in care is fast becoming good patient outcomes and experience. The reports and recommendations refer largely to general hospital high level staff during caring of older people in related and including some de

Definition of Compassion

Dictionary: “a strong feeling of sympathy and sadness for the suffering or bad luck of others and a wish to help them”

Buddhist: The desire to act upon the suffering of others: an ethical behaviour involving patience, kindness, and care.

Nursing Theory: Nursing theorists suggest that what distinguishes compassion from related qualities such as sympathy, empathy and kindness is the intention to act upon the suffering of others.

Empirical Referents

There are numerous perspectives of compassion & caring in nursing including altruistic11,12, cognitive13, quasi religious15,18, 25 and the role of compassion within this debate remains unclear. There is a need to define some descriptive characteristics and to explore how it may be recognised.

Compassion in Care

Is now a Government Directive?

What do the public & the government mean when they refer to compassion?

Descriptions of compassionate care include, dignity and comfort14; taking time and patience to listen, to offer explanations and to endeavour other communication attributes21; demonstrating empathy, kindness and care;

Emotional and Spiritual Considerations

In addition it is claimed that in order to give compassionate care, the carer (nurse) must receive compassion.

Questions

- What does compassion in the context of nursing care look like?
- Is this the essential missing ingredient in healthcare today?
- Can and should compassion be learned?
- Can this be measured, or would we only see the actor playing a part?
- Does this matter?
- If imagination and fantasy help to develop a compassionate mind, would acting be a good approach?
- Did compassion ever exist in nursing?
- Nursing: The art and the science; a journey through time. Is it a vocation or a profession?
- Did compassion ever exist in health care?
- What gets in the way of delivering compassionate care?
- Feelings of sadness and grief as the situation overweights the carer.
- Influence of society and technology
- Peer behaviour and culture
- Education and status in nursing
- Habits and routines
- Priorities and expectations of others
- Stress of workload – being busy

Supporting statements

- There is a call for compassion in nursing care (whatever this is in the context of healthcare).
- Values and behaviours are learnt through our experiences and relationships throughout life.
- Any action to implement, measure and sustain compassion in care is better than no action at all.
- The notion of distress tolerance is presented in Paul Gilbert’s book, ‘The Compassionate Mind’.
- This may offer some value in terms of supporting nurses to remain compassionate in today’s health care environment.

Examples of what does or does not constitute compassionate care in nursing are described throughout the research. These will be presented as ‘The Cases’ for compassion in nursing.

1. Model case – A story presenting ideal compassionate nursing care with all defining attributes present
2. Borderline case – An example with some of the defining attributes but not all
3. Related case – An example of good practice - not compassion in nursing care yet related and including some defining attributes
4. Contrary case – An example of poor practice – Uncompassionate care
5. Invented case – A fictional example
6. Illegitimate case – A misrepresentation of compassion