Compassion literacy for renal nurses: is it relevant, and is it useful?

Letitia Burridge, Sarah Winch, Margaret Kay & Amanda Henderson
Why *this* topic?

- **Compā’ssion**: L. *compati*, to suffer with.
- Valued and expected in health care.
- *What if compassion is lacking?*
- What are the implications?
- What can we do?
Aims

- Explore the literature on compassion in health care
- Highlight some underlying assumptions
- Define compassion literacy, and related terms
- Identify some strategies for enabling compassion literacy
The meaning of compassion

Compassion is more than seeing and feeling.

“[It] asks us to go where it hurts, to enter into places of pain, to share in brokenness, fear, confusion and anguish…challenges us to cry out with those in misery, mourn with those who are lonely, weep with those in tears…requires us to be weak with the weak, vulnerable with the vulnerable, powerless with the powerless. Compassion means full immersion into the condition of being human” (Nouwen¹, p.4).
Compassion in nursing

- Compassion traditionally underpins nursing\textsuperscript{2,3}, but…
- Workload pressures force a focus on efficiency.
- And having too much to do in too little time.
- And documentation\textsuperscript{4}.
- And fatigue.
Compassion in life

Love and compassion are necessities, not luxuries. Without them, humanity cannot survive.

Dalai Lama
Compassion in health care

- Trouble in a UK hospital\(^5\)
  

- Can we say this would never happen in renal care?

- Changing scene in renal nursing\(^6,\,7\)

- In a busy task-driven space, can care be compassionate?
## Assumptions related to compassion

- **3 main assumptions:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assumptions</th>
<th>Workplace example</th>
<th>Personal example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compassion IS care</td>
<td>We work hard so unwell people don’t wait too long.</td>
<td>By delivering patient care, I show compassion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compassion AND care</td>
<td>A leaner service should still show compassion.</td>
<td>Sick people deserve my compassion, so I owe it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compassion OR care</td>
<td>We have a duty of care to treat per guidelines.</td>
<td>I have to give precedence to treatments.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Challenges related to compassion

- To uphold compassion as a core value.
- To sustain compassion as a finite resource.
- To overcome barriers to compassionate care:
  - *Workplace factors* – e.g. culture\(^8\), hierarchies\(^9\)
  - *Personal factors* – e.g. unrecognised compassion fatigue\(^8\), staff stress\(^10\)
Compassion literacy

- Being compassion literate enhances capacity for compassion
- **What is compassion literacy?**

  A core professional competency that equips clinicians to provide compassionate care as a standard and sustainable part of their practice.

  It functions in 3 domains: self-care, patient care, care of colleagues.
## Compassion terminology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compassion</td>
<td>A core value in health care delivery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compassionate care</td>
<td>The expression of compassion in care provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compassion literacy</td>
<td>Competency for compassionate care of self and others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compassion satisfaction</td>
<td>A positive by-product of compassionate care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compassion fatigue</td>
<td>Negative by-product of compassionate care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burnout</td>
<td>Emotional and physical exhaustion; a product of prolonged stress or compassion fatigue</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Are you in this picture?

Image of matches in a box, with one match burnt-out
Compassion fatigue

- A process: compassion discomfort $\rightarrow$ stress $\rightarrow$ fatigue
- A continuum culminating in burnout.
- Consequences of compassion fatigue for all.
- Researched in various clinical settings.
Would you recognise compassion fatigue?¹³,¹⁴

- Work-related indicators
- Physical indicators
- Emotional indicators
- Tired of helping and showing compassion
Consequences of compassion fatigue\textsuperscript{12,15}

- **Personal:**
e.g. diminished health and well-being - physical, social and emotional exhaustion

- **Workplace:**
e.g. diminished performance - distancing, errors, absenteeism, attrition

- **Home:**
e.g. failure to nourish non-work-related aspects of life
Key aspects of compassion literacy

- Knowing about compassion.
Key aspects of compassion literacy

- Cultivating and applying self-care skills.
Key aspects of compassion literacy

- Recognising compassion-depleting factors and finding strategies to offset them.
## Strategies to enable compassion literacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Workplace</th>
<th>Personal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regular debriefs(^{16,17})</td>
<td>Acknowledge self-limits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build culture to legitimise staff stories(^{17})</td>
<td>Understand selfish-care(^{18})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Train for compassion in change(^{16})</td>
<td>Reflect on what is effective for you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model compassion, approachable(^{16,17,3})</td>
<td>Negotiate work/life balance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledge team in daily huddles(^{16})</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultivate team openness to change</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connect with peers through a Clinical Compassion Cafe(^{19})</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Compassion peer coaching

- A formal or informal process involving at least two colleagues.
- Working together to resolve challenges, build better habits.
- A bridge between *knowing* about compassion and *doing* something about it.

https://hbr.org/2015/02/use-your-staff-meeting-for-peer-to-peer-coaching
Conclusions

- Compassion is core business.
- Compassion literacy enables care.
- There are strategies for developing compassion literacy.
- Be compassion-literate leaders.
References

Interested in more?

Brené Brown on sympathy vs. empathy:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Evwgu369Jw
Or: https://vimeo.com/81492863

Check your levels of compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue:

Any questions?