Responding to the Compassion Agenda: Resisting Quick Fixes & Embracing Quagmires…

Person-Centred Care: The Golden Thread Programme
University of York
20th September 2013

Dr Ann Gallagher

a.gallagher@surrey.ac.uk
Abstract

Compassion, or rather the lack of it, currently seems to dominate discussions about the ethics of healthcare.

Compassion, we are told, ‘must be an essential qualification for the nursing profession’, underpin recruitment and be integrated throughout the curriculum.

All of this, it seems, with little interrogation of the concept and with scant regard for previous scholarship and research.

In this presentation I will assume a critical stance towards the current compassion agenda arguing that: compassion is not a sufficient value to underpin healthcare practice; it should be contextualised within empirical and philosophical ethics and other disciplinary perspectives; and that we need a assume a slow ethics approach if we are to make moral progress in the direction of sustainable ethical care practices.

a.gallagher@surrey.ac.uk
Overview

- Have constructive dialogue about values
- Appreciate the limitations of a compassion-focused ethics
- Learn from multi-disciplinary perspectives
- Engage with ethics scholarship & research
- Consider the value of slow...slow ethics

a.gallagher@surrey.ac.uk
Values...

‘…we are hunters and gatherers of values..’
[also interrogators]

‘…images and stories… do function as bearers of values…’

‘try to make space in my reckoning for the marvellous as well as for the murderous..’

(1995 Nobel lecture)
Monoethics Vs

Tsunami of Frameworks

Monoethics?

Focus on single values
e.g. dignity…
compassion

Multiple frameworks – see Chapter 21 Francis 2013
– ‘Values and Standards’
- Codes – NMC, HPC, GMC, health service managers, governors, directors…
- Nolan principles (p.1401)
- NHS Constitution – 6 values – what are they? (p.1414)
- ‘Putting the patient first in everything we do’ (p.1416-7)
- CNO 6 C’s (2012)
- Also ICN Code and values that emerge from scholarship & policy
e.g. Solidarity (Nuffield), person-centredness (DH 2009)

a.gallagher@surrey.ac.uk
Limitations of a compassion-focused ethics

Compassion? ‘to suffer together with’ and being moved by ‘desire to relieve suffering’ (Austin et al 2013 Lying Down in the Ever-Falling Snow’ p.12 )

- Little critical analysis
- Moral myopia e.g. Mother Teresa? (Hitchens 1995)
- Is it all about suffering? - consider Scheler’s ‘fellow-feeling’ – ‘sharing in suffering and joy’ (Austin p.19)
- Not the only value
- Not just about individuals
Multi-disciplinary perspectives...

Apples and barrels

a.gallagher@surrey.ac.uk
Remembering…
People & previous scholarship

Andrew McKie - ‘The Demolition of a Man’: Lessons from Holocaust Literature for the teaching of Nursing Ethics’ Nursing Ethics 2004 11(2)

Paul Wainwright – dignity scholarship and research


a.gallagher@surrey.ac.uk
The egg is possibly nature's most perfect design. While filling its purpose of protecting the life growing inside, the egg is sufficiently delicate to allow the chick to peck its way out into the world. The fragility of the material was the starting point for Helena Sandström's necklace made of the shells from hens' eggs. The eggs were broken carefully, and many failed attempts were made before achieving the optimum floral shape and size. The eggshells were attached to a thin wire of pure gold, meaning that the wire is very soft. The fragile necklace must be handled with the utmost care, like life itself.

**Usage:** The image is free to use accompanied by photo credit and when illustrating editorial publicity directly related to the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm, Sweden.
Concluding comments

‘To recognise the value of care calls into question the structure of values in our society. Care is not a parochial concern of women, a type of secondary moral question, or the work of the least well off in society. Care is a central concern of human life. It is time that we began to change our political and social institutions to reflect this truth’

(Joan Tronto ‘Moral Boundaries’ 2003)

Never say ‘just a nurse’....
Thank You for Your Attention