

Nursing Older People

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Practice question

How can I care for older people in a more human way?

Answer

We all want to provide efficient and effective care for older people but sometimes we focus so much on efficiency, effectiveness and achieving targets that we forget that we are caring for fellow human beings. As long ago as August 2009, the Patient's Association produced a report, *'Patients not Numbers, People not Statistics'*, which questioned standards of care on a human level. Several other reports have followed which indicate that something is wrong in care for example the Francis Report (2013) cited a target driven culture leading to neglect of human care. Advances in our technical knowledge and procedures have made it more likely that treating patients as human beings has sometimes been lost or dropped out altogether.

Galvin and Todres (2013) developed the Humanisation of Health Care Framework to guide nurses towards meeting patient's needs as human beings and offer a value base that is an important foundation in caring. Such a value base is important to nurses in offering older people the care and support that is needed. Most nurses come into their chosen profession with a strong emotional empathy for the human plight. But this can be very hard to sustain, and 'moral distress' and even 'burn-out' is something that many professionals sadly experience.

The Humanisation of Health Care Framework responds to the timely challenge of reconnecting with a disillusioned public to focus on 'what matters to them' in health services. It gives us a clear way of thinking about, and caring for people which respects their worth and dignity as human beings. The framework has eight dimension which are all interlinked (figure 1). These are not detailed lists of 'do's' and 'don'ts' or abstract ideas such as the need for more 'patient focus' or 'choice'. They are eight thoughts about what makes a person feel human that could help nurses to focus their efforts when improving care.



The human dimensions of care

Figure 1: The human dimensions of care

Together, these eight thoughts or ‘dimensions’ can be a useful touchstone for nurses to keep in touch with their values as carers and can offer directions for practice. They represent a different way of thinking and can help to identify humanising and dehumanising elements in care systems and individual interactions (Hemingway et al 2012).

Dimension	Description	Example
Insiderness	Connect with people’s ‘inward sense’ of how they are, and avoid making people feel excessively like ‘objects’	Avoid treating patients as a list of issues and risk and think instead of an individual who could be involved in solving problems
Agency	Enhance people’s sense of being an active participant in their care and avoiding anything that reduces dignity	Offer choice and freedom in every interaction and intervention
Uniqueness	Find ways in which a person can feel that they are seen as individuals, not a category or diagnosis	Get to know your patients and their lives so you can build up trusting relationships and understand what is important to them
Togetherness	Address the need for	Social isolation can

	belonging and find familiar interpersonal connections so that any sense of isolation is reduced when facing health conditions and treatment	damage health and wellbeing, enable patients to maintain and build new relationships and friendships
Sense-making	Communicate so that people don't just feel like a 'cog in a wheel'	Involve patients in what is happening, ensure that patients and their families understand their situation in their own context
Personal journey	Retain a person's sense of their own history	Life has often been interrupted for patients so we need to understand and help them manage their concerns
Sense of place	Enhance the physical environment around care so that people can feel more 'at home'	Hospital and care homes can be unfamiliar and frightening environments so we need to find objects or tasks that give comfort
Embodiment	Help people to expand their horizons beyond just a definition of themselves in terms of 'illness' or 'symptoms'	Recognise each person as unique and treat them with respect and dignity

The Humanisation of Healthcare Framework is not simple but nor is caring for patients in a human way. We have been working with groups of older people and it is clear that they 'get' the framework and can guide us in ways in which will help us to support more human care. Simple changes that take no extra time can make an enormous impact on patients so we encourage you to think about the care you give and how you could make this more human

References

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