



Lack of Compassion in the Nursing Profession: How Patient Care is Compromised

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Received date: December 11, 2021; Accepted date: December 26, 2021; Published date: January 7, 2022

Introduction

The art of compassionate nursing is a vital aspect to well-rounded, in-depth patient care. Becoming a part of the nursing field and losing empathy for individuals that are experiencing, more than likely, the most devastating and traumatic time of their lives is a problematic milestone that is often normalized within healthcare. Healthcare employees experiencing a compassion deficit within their practice must address this issue and correct it within him or her so that their current and future practice is not compromised. The healthcare industry has allowed the communities, in which they serve to become a source of ridicule and a burden, further romanticizing the loss of compassion from the provider's point of view. Proper leadership within the advanced nursing role along with understanding of the theoretical frameworks can assist in identification and correction of Advanced Practice Registered Nurse (APRN) burnout and compassion fatigue.

Within this paper nursing theory that can assist in correcting healthcare compassion fatigue will be identified and explained. Nursing leadership styles and theories will be explained along with a depiction of how adequate leadership can assist in combating APRN compassion deficit. Nursing standards and scope of practice will be identified and their ability to drive the resolution of said issue will further explained. Lastly, Jesuit values will be discussed in relation to APRNs experiencing a compassion deficit and how these values can assist in solving the issue at hand.

Description of Nursing Issue

Compassionate nursing is the act of caring about a patient while concurrently caring for a patient. While knowing medication interactions, when to be concerned about a deviation from normal, and how to manage a patient's respiratory status is important in healthcare – compassion has been coined one of the most important characteristics of a nurse and advanced practice nurse [1]. The lack of compassion in nursing is an issue that prevails worldwide and continues to become more prevalent as nurses' job descriptions continue to grow. A study performed on 650 oncology nurses showed that 52% of the nurses surveyed were experiencing some type of compassion fatigue found that lack of compassion was noticeably increased in nurses with more years of experience [2]. Therefore, it can be assumed that compassion fatigue directly coincides with nursing burnout. With the aging population healthcare professionals are coming in to contact with more chronic, ill patients. With proper utilization of involved nurse leadership, use of nursing theory and a

proactive advanced practice nurse, compassion fatigue can be combated effectively.

Nursing Theory

The importance of compassion in advanced practice nursing is immeasurable. Unfortunately, modern nursing relies highly on quantitative evidence rather than the emotional prospect of patient care. According to Jean Watson, a nationally recognized nursing theorist, a disease may be eradicated, but the patient will remain ill because without caring, complete health cannot be achieved [3]. Advanced practice nurses can become preoccupied with the mechanics behind healthcare and overlook the most basic, fundamental, key to survival as a human. Advanced practice nursing care has been consistently asked to perform similarly to sectors of healthcare that focus on medications and cures for the patient, rather than the emotional and spiritual need. Nursing care should be complimentary to these professions, but not mirrored. Reciprocal sympathy and understanding between practitioners and their patients will create an environment of trust, optimal patient treatment, and decreased healthcare costs [4]. The advanced practice nurse must take all of these facts into consideration and intertwine them into their daily practice for the most positive patient outcomes.

Jean Watson

Jean Watson explained compassion and caring as the most important factor in determining a patient's health. She explains that patients are not simply black and white, but are an environment [3]. Watson's nursing care theory, The Theory of Human Caring, was developed to promote the central component of nursing care compassion. Advanced practice nurses cannot treat their patient as a whole while experiencing a compassion deficit. Watson explained that healing requires yin energy [3]. Yin energy is defined as caring and love, while Yang energy is intervention with medical technologies [3]. She further explains that no patient can heal with solely yang energy therefore the practitioner must exhibit caring and compassionate practice for their patient to survive and thrive [3].

The advanced practitioner must have comprehensive knowledge about their patient's needs. A study performed on patients in Iran in 2017 explained the importance of compassion in nursing and how the patient cannot be adequately treated without caring attributes and a meaningful connection [4]. Within this study, the importance of simply providing compassionate care took precedence, in the eyes of the patient, over providing an extensive amount of compassionate care [4]. Therefore, Watson's theory that a patient cannot fully heal without compassion and love is proven to be true throughout healthcare, universally. The advanced practice nurse has the responsibility of ensuring all of the needs of their patient are met, mechanically and spiritually.

Ernestine Wiedenbach

For the advanced practitioner to have the ability to function at a high capacity and meet demanding patient outcomes he or she must consider the way the patient perceives the condition they are currently experiencing. Ernestine Wiedenbach explained the core of nursing practice is understanding and viewing the patient as an individual [5]. Lack of compassion in nursing practice does not allow the patient to

feel validated and identified, which are main components of Wiedenbach's theory [5]. An example of utilizing this theory in advanced practice nursing in relation to compassionate health care would be using empathy to relate with the mother of a preterm infant when she is unable to produce breast milk for her baby. Rather than suggesting that she pump more frequently and suggest that maybe breastfeeding is not the correct path for her, the empathetic nurse would ask the mother how she feels about breastfeeding. The practitioner should help the mother develop a healthy relationship with breastfeeding to allow for the experience to be positive. Wiedenbach explains that the way a patient views their situation is just as vital as the way the patient's condition is being treated [5]. Compassionate nursing, along with adequate leadership, from the advanced practitioner is imperative to helping the patient view their condition or obstacle with a positive interpretation.

Aspirational Leadership

Leadership is a vital aspect of efficient and successful healthcare. Advanced practice nurses are leaders in their field and have many bodies within the healthcare system relying on them for effective leadership. For the nurse practitioner to combat the possibility of experiencing a compassion deficit the nurse leader must have key leadership qualities as well as have the ability to consult leadership with exceptional merits in time of need.

The advanced practice nurse should display empathy to their patients and patients' families. Empathy creates an environment of trust between the client, the advanced practice nurse and other healthcare professionals. The nurse practitioner should also exhibit self-awareness to be a successful leader. The practitioner that is self-aware is able to understand their own actions and how their qualities positively, or negatively, impact those surrounding them. Lastly, effective communication skills are vital to the nurse leader. Efficient communication with providers, other healthcare professionals, and patients along with their families, is key to optimal patient outcomes and combating the loss of compassion in the healthcare field.

Leadership Theory

When experiencing, or combating, a compassion deficit, a healthcare professional must be in-tune with the emotional aspect of their practice. Transformational leadership is an exceptional leadership theory that is committed to addressing the emotions of leaders, and more importantly, the followers [6]. This leadership theory is based on the concept that it is motivating for the followers to go above and beyond the expectations. Transformational leadership allows followers to understand and raises their consciousness about the value of a specific set of goals. Advanced practice nurses that portray characteristics of transformational leadership motivate their colleagues to support the greater good, rather than satisfying their own self-interests [6].

Transformational leaders are empowering leaders, they create a culture of change and allow followers to feel empowered and encourage their supporters to discuss and try new things. An advanced practice nurse should allow the nurses and other healthcare professionals that they work with to speak freely about their thoughts and ideas. This fosters an environment of encouragement and trust. The advanced practice nurse that is a transformational leader puts a strong emphasis on their followers needs [6]. Therefore, if the practitioner or their peers are experiencing a compassion deficit the

transformational leader will be a role model to promote change. This leader will foster an environment of strong morals and will provide resources for the healthcare professional to continue to display compassion to their patients and colleagues.

Transformational Leadership Solving Compassion Deficit

Transformational leadership has the ability to support advanced practice nurses, and nurse leaders, that are experiencing a compassion deficit within their practice. This style of leadership allows the advanced practice nurse to address the issue they are facing with morality and innovation. Building trust within healthcare is imperative to creating a compassionate environment. The leader that is approached by staff experiencing compassion fatigue should promote confidence that the issue will be resolved. A transformational leader will allow the advanced practice nurse experiencing the lack of compassion to discuss potential solutions without judgment [7]. For example, the practitioner experiencing compassion fatigue may suggest taking a small break from critically ill patients and instead, taking care of stable patients for a short amount of time. The transformational nurse leader will respond to this suggestion and promote the nurse to feel empowered about his or her decision. Transformational leadership addresses the emotional side of leadership and their followers need [7]. This is imperative when combating compassion deficit within healthcare.

Scope and Standards of Practice

The American Nurses Association (ANA) presents standards and goals to guide effective, quality nursing care. The APRN should be well familiarized with the scope and standards of practice in which he or she practices within. Lack of compassion within the APRN role is contraindicated within the ANA's scope and standards of practice. The APRN practicing ethically and contributing to quality nursing practice will identify a lack of compassion within his or her practice early and take measures to prevent the issue from progressing further.

The ANA recognizes that the APRN should have an ethically sound practice to perform adequately within healthcare [8]. Losing feelings of empathy towards patients does not allow the APRN to advocate clearly and effectively for the patients they care for. The ANA describes ethical practice as practicing with respect and compassion for all people [8]. Therefore, combating and identifying a potential or current loss of empathy is imperative to perform within the ANA standards of practice. This standard of nursing practice can be related to Jean Watson's Theory of Human Caring. Jean Watson describes the patient's inability to fully thrive and heal without caring for the patient as a whole [3]. Respecting patient's inherent dignity and unique attributes is directly related to caring for the patient as a whole and is imperative within ethical practice, according to the ANA [8]. Within Jean Watson's theory the ANA's standard of ethics is able to be compared when caring for a patient as a whole and in turn creating an environment of compassion.

Ethical nursing directly relates to Ernestine Wiedenbach's theory of identifying a patient's need through observing a patient's behaviors, the meaning of the behaviors, and determining the patient's ability to resolve the discomfort they are experiencing [5]. The ANA coins ethical nursing as committing themselves to the healthcare consumer and advocating for their health [8]. The compassionate nurse will implement Wiedenbach's theory to the utilization of ethical nursing to

respect a patient's ability to display pain and discover the meaning behind the pain the patient is experiencing. Wiedenbach also explained optimal nursing care as caring for the patient as an individual [5]. To practice within an ethical standard the patient must be viewed separately from their diagnosis and the compassionate nurse will understand each patient requires specific care.

The ANA's standard of quality of practice describes the characteristics the APRN should demonstrate when caring effectively for patients. Understanding and identifying the nurse's inability to provide compassionate care to their patients is violating the ANA's standard of quality of practice. The ANA describes quality of practice as patient-centered and the APRN should identify opportunities to improve the ability of the APRN to center their care on the patient [8]. Compassion is a vital aspect of optimal outcomes, patient-centered care and satisfaction within healthcare which directly relates to the ANA's standard of Quality of Practice [8].

Jean Watson's theory of caring can be directly related to the ANA's standard of quality of practice in many ways. Carative factors should be found in any nurse who portrays quality care within the ANA's scope and standards of practice, which is the most prominent aspect Watson's theory [3]. Watson explains displaying compassion and utilizing strategies to improve patient care potentiates the APRN's capabilities [3]. Therefore, a nurse experiencing a compassionate deficit is unable to provide optimal care in relation to the ANA's standard of quality of practice.

Lastly, Wiedenbach's nursing theory can be utilized to further describe the ANA's standard of quality of practice in relation to compassionate nursing care. Wiedenbach explained that a patient is any person receiving assistance from the healthcare system [5]. Her theory includes education and advice as nursing care [5]. The ability to contribute and improve healthcare efficiency is the APRN promoting the standard of quality of practice within his or her own practice while also providing compassionate nursing care.

Jesuit Values

When practicing as a compassionate nurse Jesuit values are important to consider when creating an environment of empathy and promoting excellent nursing care. *Cura Personalis*, care for the whole person, is easily identifiable when relating values to compassion within the APRN role [9]. When caring for the entire person the Jesuit APRN dedicates his or her nursing practice to allowing the patient to be considered an entire person, not simply his or her diagnosis [9]. The empathetic APRN will not allow him or herself to experience a compassion deficit when recognizing *cura personalis* as a core trait of his or her nursing practice. Caring for the entire person is creating an environment of compassion and catering to a patient's spiritual, as well as medical, need.

The Jesuit value of reflection and discernment is described as striving to seek higher knowledge and leave the world better than it was found [9]. The APRN has the ability to provide leadership that

follows the Jesuit value of reflection and discernment by being an empathetic leader and caregiver. An APRN who recognizes his or her potential for compassion deficit and corrects this deficit is directly utilizing the Jesuit value of reflection and discernment. Jesuit values are a useful resource for fulfilling, compassion centered nursing care.

Conclusion

The nursing field is unique in that medical and diagnostic knowledge is equally as important as knowledge of spiritual and emotional health. The APRN must portray an advanced level of skill when treating healthcare consumers. Compassionate care is vital to optimal patient outcomes and health success. Nursing theory and leadership play an imperative role in identifying and correcting a potential, or current, compassion deficit. The ANA's scope and standards of practice can create guidelines for APRN's to mold his or her own practice around. Lastly, Jesuit values give the APRN guidance when creating an environment of moral and spiritual wellbeing. The APRN should reflect on his or her practice regularly and allow him or herself to correct his or her shortcomings with the described interventions. With an environment of compassion and skill the nursing field will create patient outcomes that are unmatched within other health professions.

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