Why is compassion and caring important? What’s the evidence?

Dr Robin Youngson
Evidence summary 1

- Healthcare has lost compassion and patients are suffering
- Health professionals are burning out
- Kindness, caring and compassion are the major source of health professional wellbeing, happiness and resilience
- Human beings are intimately connected - our feelings, thoughts and intentions change our patients’ physiology and outcomes
Evidence summary 2

• Human touch is healing
• Patients’ emotional and psychological health profoundly affects their physical health status
• Compassionate caring saves time
• Compassionate caring achieves better outcomes and costs less
Care and compassion?
Report of the Health Service Ombudsman on ten investigations into NHS care of older people
Student nurses graduated with high ideals of compassionate, whole person care.

Within two years of starting practice, most were “compromised idealists” or “crushed idealists”

(Jill Maben 2007)
Physicians Foundation 2008 Survey of 12,000 USA Physicians

42% of physicians said the professional morale of their colleagues is either “poor” or “very low”
78% of physicians said medicine is either “no longer rewarding” or “less rewarding”
60% of doctors would not recommend medicine as a career to young people.
POSITIVITY

Top-Notch Research
Reveals the 3 to 1 Ratio
That Will Change Your Life

BARBARA L. FREDRICKSON, PH.D.
Two competing systems of motivation:

“Approach”

kindness
appreciation
gratitude
Mindfulness
the joy of service

“Withdrawal”

pain
anxiety
fear
distress
Six components of compassion (Paul Gilbert 2009)

- Empathy
- Sympathy
- Non-judgement
- Sensitivity
- Motivation
- Tolerance of distress
Compassion ‘tipping point’

(Decety 2010; Fredrickson 2008)
The key to strengthening compassion in healthcare is building the well-being, positivity and resilience of health professionals.

The practices that enhance well-being are:

- kindness
- appreciation
- gratitude
- mindfulness
- self-compassion
- the joy of service
An intimate connection
The mirror neuron system
Interpersonal neurobiology
The healing power of touch - evidence from randomised controlled trials

- Reduced pain, reduced cortisol enhanced immune function in post-op patients
- Reduced rate of complications and hospital length of stay in premature infants
- Reduced pain levels in multiple studies (meta analysis)
- Reduced fatigue and pain in cancer patients
- Increased Hb levels in anaemic students
- Reduced restlessness and cortisol variation in nursing home residents with dementia
Patients’ brainwaves synchronise with your heartbeat
The difference in mortality rate between optimists and pessimists is as big as the difference between smokers and non-smokers.
Compassionate caring saves time
Compassionate caring achieves better outcomes and costs less
Introducing a new international movement...

Hearts in Healthcare is a new community, established to champion compassionate care. We believe bringing like-minded people together is the first step to re-humanising healthcare around the world.
Our aims are simple....

- To allow compassionate caring to rise above institutional rules and practices
- Encourage health workers to reconnect to the heart of their practice
- Increase the happiness, well-being and resilience of healthcare workers
www.heartsinhealthcare.com

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References