

## **Compassionate Care in Mental Health Nursing Practice: What do we mean?**

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The NHS Constitution defines what compassion might mean in practice:

*We respond with humanity and kindness to each person's pain, distress, anxiety or need. We search for the things we can do, however small, to give comfort and relieve suffering. We find time for those we serve and work alongside."*

(Department of Health, 2009a, p. 12)

### **Introduction**

Merseycare NHS Trust has its own continuous improvement strategy outlined within the Perfect Care Framework. If we are to achieve this we will need to work together in a very cohesive way, and espouse the values outlined within our Staff Charter. (*Continuous improvement, accountability, respect and enthusiasm*).

Underpinning our own Perfect Care Strategy is the Department of Health's Strategy and Vision for Nursing, Midwifery and Care Staff (DoH 2012) This document applies to all qualified and unqualified nursing and care staff. It has a framework called the 6 C's that outlines the components of high quality care consistently across the country based on six key concepts **Care, Compassion, Commitment, Communication, Competence and Courage**.

This hand out focuses on compassion because it can be seen as the key to all the other five competences. The Chief Nursing Officer in her introduction to the Strategy and Vision for Nursing, Midwifery and Care Staff (DoH 2012) suggests compassion must be at the heart of health care.

The Collins (2003) dictionary defines Compassion

*'as a feeling of distress and pity for the suffering or misfortune of another, often including the desire to alleviate it'*

It would for example, be impossible to be **compassionate** without being and emotionally intelligent **communicator**. This is someone, who is self aware of the impact and influence they have on others, is flexible, sensitive, positive, is an effective listener, empathic, assertive, kind and reflective. It would be impossible to give compassionate **care** unless you were **competent**, that means keeping up

to date with changes in mental health care practice.

A compassionate person will also need to be **courageous**, because in the desire to '*alleviate any difficulties*' as outlined in the definition of compassion, the patient may need the individual nurse or care worker to advocate for them, or to challenge poor practice, report a colleague for poor practice. Being courageous can have compassionate outcomes for the patient if the nurse or care worker has the personal strength and vision to innovate and embrace new ways of working. This requires the personal quality of **commitment**

So, there can be no caring without compassion, we can break down the skills involved in compassionate care, as outlined in a book written by Chambers and Ryder 2009 called '*Compassionate Care in Nursing*' the authors attempted to embrace these different perspectives on compassion and identified the following six key components of compassionate care:

- Empathy and sensitivity
- Dignity and respect
- Listening and responding
- Diversity and cultural competence
- Choice and priorities
- Empowerment and advocacy.

So in summary, to deliver compassionate care we need to develop the specific skills outlined above. Health Professionals, Nurses, Health Care Assistants and Support Workers all have their own **Codes of Conduct** that clearly outline the individuals own responsibility of keeping up to date with the changes in mental health care. Another key skill is that of reflection, this is the ability to examine constructively and critically our own attitudes, values and knowledge base and work individually and collaboratively to improve and develop.

### **Reflective Questions Compassion**

What are the qualities of a compassionate person; are you compassionate?

What are your listening skills like? (Do you know how to paraphrase, reflect back, and use silence therapeutically?)

Think of a time when you were compassionate to a patient, what did you do

and what was the outcome?

Can you think of other ways to strengthen your own compassionate practice?

How are you 'self compassionate' (look after yourself)? Why is this important?

Do you have the emotional reserves to really identify with patients in distress?

### **Further reading on Compassion and Emotional intelligence**

Ten best books on emotional intelligence <http://www.onlineuniversities.com/the-10-best-books-on-emotional-intelligence>

Baughan, J and Smith, A (2013) Compassion, caring and communication Harlow: Pearson Chambers,

Department of Health (2012) Compassion in Practice: Nursing, Midwifery and Care Staff Our Vision Our Strategy London Department of Health

Chambers and Ryder, E (2012) Excellence in compassionate nursing care London: Radcliffe

Spandler H Stickley T (2011) No hope without compassion: the importance of compassion in recovery-focused mental health services Journal of Mental Health, December 2011; 20(6): 555–566

Waring, A (2012) The heart of care: a guide to person-centred compassionate elder care London: Souvenir Press