Compassion is an essential component of good nursing care and can be conveyed through the smallest actions

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Implications for practice and research

- Patients’ experiences of compassion and lack of compassion contribute to current understanding of complexity within compassionate nursing practice.
- Patients believe that nurses can develop compassionate practice through exposure to vignettes of their experiences.
- Further research on patient experiences could help identify how to enable ‘fleeting acts’ that convey compassion.

Context

Compassion is not a new concept within healthcare. However, compassion has become the focus of much research and debate during the past 10 years, following reports of lack of compassion within UK healthcare practice. This recent intense focus has addressed many aspects of care but the ‘fault’ in the system is not as simple as some suggest. Time cannot be turned back and why would society want to when some of those ‘old ways’ included: parents kept away from their hospitalised children; people with mental health problems being shut away in institutions and restrained; far less sophisticated and less effective surgical and medical treatments for trauma and disease.

This study reaffirms compassion within 21st century healthcare as a complex concept. It has multiple predisposing and constraining factors within today’s practice and education environments. Compassionate practice does not simply rely on an individual demonstrating empathy and kindness but on the moral, emotional and organisational environment within which that individual learns their caring craft. Attempts to identify and address deficits in compassion require recognition of this complexity in order to avoid over-simplified or single focused solutions.

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References