

The Art of Nursing: Meeting the Needs of the Patient with Serious Illness

Sarah Valinski, RN, BSN, CHPN
Staff Nurse, Palliative Care
Department of Nursing
Mayo Clinic, Rochester, MN

Ellen Wild, RN, BSN, CHPN
Staff Nurse, Palliative Care
Department of Nursing
Mayo Clinic, Rochester, MN

Purpose: To help nurses understand their role in supporting patients' values, preferences, and goals in the setting of a serious illness, through the utilization of communication strategies (for example: dignity conserving care model) that provide whole person-centered care.

Dame Cicely Saunders (physician, nurse, and social worker), the founder of the modern hospice movement, recognized the importance of care at the end of life and the need to attend to the whole person (not simply the illness or diagnosis the person has). She famously stated, "You matter because you are you, and you matter to the last moment of your life".

Nurses are at the forefront of care and are uniquely positioned to provide compassionate, whole person care; addressing the physical, social, emotional, and spiritual needs of patients living with serious, life limiting illness. The core value of Mayo Clinic is "the needs of the patient come first". Significant advances in medicine provide patients with a multitude of treatment options which can change the focus of care to fixing problems, often losing sight of the person they are caring for. The medical community is challenged with how to balance advancements in treatment with care that meets the values, preferences, and goals of the patient.

Communication is vital to providing care that meets the needs of the patient and preserves the patient's personhood. Whole person care and "intensive caring" can decrease suffering, improve quality of life, and provide hope and healing (Chochinov, 2023). Presence, bearing witness, and listening to the patient's lived experience and personal narrative are key to meeting their needs and providing care that is in accordance with their wishes, preferences, and values.

Conclusion:

We are given a great opportunity to walk alongside patients and their families, to be part of their lived experience with serious illness. Communication strategies that assist in supporting patient's values, preferences, and goals lead to therapeutic relationships that leave the patient and nurse transformed.

Reference

Chochinov, HM. (2023). Intensive Caring: Reminding Patients They Matter. *Journal of Clinical Oncology* (41)16, 2884-2887