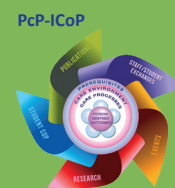


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BOOK REVIEW

Compassion, the Core Value in Person-Centred Care by Margreet van der Cingel

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I have had the privilege of reading Margreet van der Cingel's 2022 book, *Compassion, the Core Value in Person-centred Care*, which is the result of a programme of research including a PhD and two empirical masters studies. The doctorate focused on three things: a theoretical and philosophical exploration of compassion; a study of compassion in the history of nursing; and a study of contemporary daily nursing practices. The empirical masters studies explored the role of compassion in the development of the professional nursing identity, and the strategies of novice nurses for developing and sustaining compassion (van der Cingel, 2022, p 4).

The book is split into three chapters:

- **Compassion throughout the ages:** exploring compassion as a construct and its significance within society, as well as compassion in the history of nursing care
- **Compassion in care today:** explores compassion as a multilayered concept; looks at the professional behaviours that demonstrate compassion, how these behaviours impact on the professional relationship and how to balance them to avoid burnout; and asks what happens when compassion is absent
- **Compassion, ground rule for evidence-based practice:** explores how compassion influences quality care and how it can be a measure of quality care; discusses whether or not compassion can be learned; and considers compassion as a part of the nursing identity

The author uses a quote from Norma Lang in the preface of the book:

'... if we cannot name it, we cannot control it, finance it, teach it, research it or put it into public policy' (p vii).

Taking its cue from the quote, the book challenges the reader to name or identify compassion and reflect on how it is integrated within their own lived experience as a nurse. We are invited to deconstruct our understanding of compassion and reconstruct it into known behaviours and approaches that can be learned and shared, and finally to demonstrate that compassion is the core and underpinning value for the realisation of person-centred nursing care. Early in the book it was encouraging to see a reference to the Person-centred Practice Framework (McCormack and McCance, 2017), which is a theoretical framework that identifies the constructs of person-centred practice at the micro level and which aligns to compassion as defined and discussed by Margreet van der Cingel in her book.

The theoretical and philosophical exploration of compassion covers literature from the disciplines of philosophy, health and nursing sciences, as well as allied health sciences such as psychology and biomedical science. The reader is taken on an interesting journey, particularly from a historical perspective, beginning with compassion and religion as the motivating factors to care for the sick. While that motivation was often referred to as a calling, when nursing developed into a profession, compassion was considered an act of service and a labour of love. Florence Nightingale challenged this notion and demonstrated that compassion was a professional requirement in nursing. The book reminds us how, although medical colleagues disagreed, Nightingale highlighted a need to work with what matters to the patient in the context of their healthcare and that the type of honesty and truth telling she favoured leads to shared decision making and self-determination for the patient. The journey explores the medical/nursing gender bias and the influence this has had on diminishing the value of compassion by defining it as a soft skill rather than a strong and explicit core value of nursing.

Chapter two has a strong focus on compassion as a professional behaviour and how this is demonstrated and experienced within seven dimensions: attentiveness, active listening, naming of suffering, involvement, helping, presence and apprehension. A number of quotes from service users and staff involved in the author's research are used to bring these dimensions to life. The strengths and challenges of compassion in nursing are explored, as well as the risk of fatigue and burnout. The final chapter aligns with aspects of practice development, including how to support the learner, the impact of workplace culture, and the values that underpin compassion and how they can play out in interpersonal work relationships.

The text is populated with reflections or knowledge challenges, with which the reader is invited to engage. Each of these activities is quite detailed and although I did complete some of the reflections, I imagine it would take quite some time to do them all. I think these activities would be ideal to do as a group or within teams, to promote discussion while exploring and understanding the role of compassion in person-centred practice. This would offer an opportunity to choose reflections or learnings that were relevant to the needs of a nursing team rather than follow a linear process, although either approach would have value and the learning would contribute to continuing professional development.

It must be highlighted that the most recent entry in the reference list is from 2012, although there is a more up-to-date list of publications from the author's own research (up until 2018) included in the introduction (p 8) where the programme of research is discussed in detail. However, 10 years is a long time in the academic world, prompting the question, what studies focusing on compassion and person-centred care published between 2010 and 2022 could have been included in support of the arguments put forward? Understanding that their absence might be due to when the initial research was undertaken, I found myself looking for more recent references. Without doing a detailed literature search on compassion within nursing, recent relevant publications in the *International Practice Development Journal* include those by Katherine Waddington (2016), Suzanne Murray and Karen Tuqiri (2020) and Marie Matriano and Rebekkah Middleton (2020). There has also been significant work by Tanya McCance and colleagues such as Val Wilson in relation to measuring person-centred practice, which would support the argument and underpinning values of compassion put forward in this book (McCance et al., 2011; McCance and Wilson, 2015; McCance et al., 2020; Wilson et al., 2021). An opportunity was missed for the author to link the measurement of compassion to McCance's research and methodology of evaluating person-centredness within nursing and midwifery using the Person-centred Practice framework. However, despite this gap in supporting literature, this book makes an important contribution with regard to compassion as a core value of person-centred practice.

I think nurses at all stages of their career, as well as academics and researchers, would benefit from reading this book. It is a small volume packed with information but is easy to read, and the historical threads and influences create a sense of understanding of how compassion has become as a core value of person-centred practice in nursing.

In conclusion, the author makes a strong argument for compassion's place in person-centred practice, which is summed up by the following passage:

'Good nursing care will always take the care user as a person as its starting point. What dictates nursing practice should not be the guidelines or protocols, however scientifically underpinned they may be, or routine... It must always be the needs of the other human being who requires your professional help that sets the rule' (p 85).

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