

6Cs and mental health

Could Zumba classes really help nurses uphold the principles of compassionate care in the face of aggression?



LAST YEAR NHS England chief executive Simon Stevens revealed a new strategy to help reduce stress and improve the health of NHS staff which included free Zumba classes. Mr Stevens acknowledged that the health and wellbeing of NHS staff has an effect on patients, and that NHS staff experience high levels of stress and violence (BBC News 2015).

It got me thinking about how the Compassion in Practice 6Cs strategy fits in with an overstretched workforce. Launched in 2012, the 6Cs had noble sentiments: who would not want to practise with care, compassion, courage, commitment, competence, and communication?

But how easy is it for staff to uphold the 6Cs at those crucial moments when a patient is being physically abusive, or when patients demand attention and paperwork seems to be never-ending, or when you have to de-escalate an aggressive patient towards the end of your third long day shift?

Care and compassion are crucial for healthcare professionals, but events such as those at the Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust (Francis 2013) have shown that this can be lacking.

Maintaining high standards in the

6Cs is even more of a challenge for those who work in mental health and learning disability services, where not only do we have to deal with patients' physical problems, we have to address the challenging behaviour that often accompanies deteriorating mental health.

Violence against NHS staff is on the increase, especially in mental health settings (NHS Protect 2015), and healthcare professionals need to dig deeper. Our approach to aggression has to go beyond containment to employ a person-to-person approach where we try to understand why the person is behaving the way they do.

Courage and competence

Knowing when to intervene and what to do during a crisis has always been part of our training. However, it takes a great deal of courage to know when to 'go in' – and when not to – and even more courage to confidently apply our skills during a crisis.

Staff need to feel competent to tackle aggression but courage can only come from within. Nurses need the courage to act when expected so that they can ensure the safety of all, courage to put their own fears aside and the courage to challenge bad practices.

For every patient to gain a positive experience while being cared for requires unquestionable commitment from staff. In relation to violence and aggression, everyone needs to commit to the reduced use of restrictive restraint practices and ensuring that every path is explored to give patients a more positive outlet for their frustrations.

Staff should commit to delving deeper to the root of the problem and address the causes rather than the consequences, an approach that is supported in guidance such as Positive and Proactive Care (Department of Health (DH) 2014), the Mental Health Act Code of Conduct (DH 2015) and NICE guidance on the short-term management of violence and aggression (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence 2015).

Communication

Communication is central to sharing knowledge, experiences and expertise, and is a means of bridging gaps that might otherwise be catalysts to violence.

Effective management of violence and aggression is achieved through effective communication, being able to understand patient concerns and interpreting them to formulate effective care plans.

The 6Cs should be an integral part of our day-to-day activities. When it comes to dealing with violence and aggression, nurses and other staff need to look for that courage, confidence and competence and, above all, demonstrate a caring and compassionate attitude that ensures safety, security and satisfaction for all.

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