

And is there time to be compassionate?

E há tempo para ser compassivo?

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Survivors of a very violent bus accident were asked, after they had recovered, what memories they had. They remembered mainly two things: the pain they had experienced and the lack of humanity with which they had been treated. They had been admitted to the most modern and sophisticated hospitals in the country and treated by specialist and distinguished doctors... but this was not enough!

It is not enough to “try to solve” the physicalness of the problems and situations. The issues, in health systems, are never merely technical, material, or operational.

Health institutions are, essentially, a community of people serving other people, in a society of people. This means that in any process or activity, people come before, during, and after. People are central, core, essential.

Therefore, the service that is provided in a health care institution must be humanistic and humanizing. The health care professional should be able to pay attention, to tune in to the other, to deeply understand the problem, and to act to solve it. Those who work in the health care system need to have a heart and hands: to see and discover the wounds and vulnerabilities of others and, furthermore, to have the skills to care for them.

Humanisation is particularly present in paediatrics: the innocence of children makes their suffering and vulnerability particularly difficult to bear; the children's parents suffer the unspeakable because they would often prefer to suffer themselves rather than see their children suffer. When they become ill, the hope that

children always carry with them is threatened in an incomprehensible way...

Humanisation involves small, concrete, daily actions: clear identification of doctors and nurses who interact with patients, longer and more flexible visiting hours, maintaining eye contact during interaction with patients and relatives, explaining diagnoses and risks and drawbacks of proposed treatments, kindly greeting the patient, facilitating relevant and timely information, caring for patients' privacy, ensuring spiritual and psychological support, attentive listening to patients and relatives, avoiding unnecessary noise, not interrupting patients' sleep periods unnecessarily, preventing and treating burnout among professionals... and a myriad of other actions that the attentive and interested eye can discern in the daily life of health institutions.

This promotes a style of work that values caring for people more than managing things; collaboration more than competition; accomplishment more than speculation; tenacity more than brilliance; caring more than efficiency.

This humanizing attitude has an unexpected innovative potential: when one sees more deeply, when one pays attention to details, one discovers with greater clarity and insight the needs of others and ways to meet them. You reach further, you have more impact.

This leads to profound organizational change because you build high quality relationships among the members of the organization, create interpersonal connections based on trust, strengthen the sharing of values, and ultimately build commitment around the noble mission of the health institution.

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But, is there time for all this?

The authors of *Compassionomics*¹, tell us that only 40 seconds are needed to establish a humanising relationship... 40 seconds of empathy, attentive listening, compassionate gaze, humanising attitude. What takes place in the complex doctor-patient relationship can be extrapolated to the interpersonal relationships established in the day-to-day life of healthcare institutions.

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1. *Compassionomics: The Revolutionary Scientific Evidence that Caring Makes a Difference*; Stephen Trzeciak, Anthony Mazzaelli, Studer Group, 2019

As people, we are all special, different, sometimes surprising. It is up to everyone to value people and teams with kindness, dignity, respect, and authenticity. It is up to the leaders to create conditions and provide stimuli for solid interpersonal relationships to be established and strong bonds and commitments to build unity in the organizations.

References

1. Trzeciak S, Mazzaelli A. (Eds). *Compassionomics: The Revolutionary Scientific Evidence that Caring Makes a Difference*. Studer Group, 2019.