

SaskEthics

An Ethics Newsletter for Catholic Healthcare Organizations in Saskatchewan

Trauma-informed care respects the whole person

Dear *SaskEthics* Readers,



This month, St. Paul's Hospital had the opportunity to reflect on the importance of trauma-informed care with a

presentation from Knowledge Translation Specialist, Erin Beckwell.

If you are anything like me, you probably read the phrase “trauma-informed care” and immediately thought that the presentation was about trauma care for patients in a busy emergency department. But trauma-informed care is not focused on individuals as they experience bodily trauma. Rather, this is care that respects that people continue to be affected by traumatic events long after the physical scars have healed.

For example, consider the case of a man who is brought into hospital but begins yelling at his nurses whenever they try to change his dressing. It would be easy to dismiss this man as a mean-spirited or ill-mannered person. It is much more difficult to get to the root of why he is responding to his care in such a way.

How would our care change if we knew that he had been confined in an institution in the past? If we were aware of his history as a prisoner of war? If it turned out he had suffered abuse at the hands of a healthcare provider when he was young?

Trauma-informed care challenges us to treat every person we meet as a person with a history that remains part of who they are. This type of care asks the question, “what has happened to this person?” rather than focusing on describing, “what is wrong with this person?”

This holistic approach should be at the centre of all our interactions, but it is even more needed in our healthcare system because institutions often trigger people in ways that they would not experience in the community. The traumatic event they experienced may be extreme or relatively minor, a single occurrence or a series of events. What matters is that it is significant to the person who no longer feels comfortable when faced with a situation that reminds them of their traumatic event.

Once we start to see those around us through a trauma-informed lens, it becomes easier to see ways in which we



can help them manage the emotions they feel while in hospital. Whenever possible, we can provide patients/residents with choices to help them feel more in control of their environment; we can build trust with those in our care; and we can support each other as we work in an environment that can be just as traumatizing for staff as it can be for those we serve.

More information on trauma-informed care can be found at the Manitoba Trauma Information and Education Centre:

<https://trauma-informed.ca>

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Suggested Reading

In *Rediscovering the Art of Dying*, Catholic bioethicist Sr. Nuala Kenny provides a heartfelt reflection on the Christian meaning of suffering and dying. Sr. Kenny's use of personal insight, moving stories and scripture passages draw the reader in to uncover how the way we die affects the way we live. This book is a powerful read for anyone who has journeyed with a dying person, and an invaluable teaching tool for those who seek to develop a Christian approach to end-of-life care.

Rediscovering the Art of Dying is available at amazon.ca.

"An insightful manual for families and friends, doctors and nurses, caregivers and ministers who face many complex and painful issues surrounding suffering and death. An impressive work!"

+ ROBERT F. MORNEAU

REDISCOVERING THE ART OF DYING

How Jesus' experience and
our stories reveal a new vision
of compassionate care

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