

SaskEthics

An Ethics Newsletter for Catholic Healthcare Organizations in Saskatchewan

Compassion is a verb

Dear *SaskEthics* Readers,



This year's annual convention of the Catholic Health Association of Saskatchewan (CHAS) provided an opportunity for networking, learning for the head, and learning for the heart. This should come as no surprise to those of you who have attended a CHAS Convention before, but I thought it worth mentioning in case we start taking these opportunities for granted. There were many important takeaways from the convention, but the one that I think is most important for our understanding of ethics came from keynote presenter Dr. Shane Sinclair's research into compassion. To summarize his work in short: Compassion is a verb.

Over the course of several studies, Dr. Sinclair and his team have interviewed patients and healthcare professionals to learn more about what the word 'compassion' means. They found that compassion is more than a feeling; it is an action that we take when we enter into the suffering of another person.

According to Sinclair's research team, compassion can only exist in the space between two people. One person (usually the patient in a hospital setting), brings their suffering, while the other (e.g., the healthcare professional) brings a virtuous intent. In this context 'virtuous' does not just mean being nice or having a professional demeanor. Dr. Sinclair stressed that the patients involved had amazing radar for distinguishing true compassion from superficial kindness. For them, a compassionate healthcare professional needed to be present to the person they were caring for. The two persons needed to come to know each other to find ways to alleviate suffering.

Consider for example, a food and nutrition staff member, Jake, who takes a tray of food to a patient, Sam. Jake could drop off the tray without saying a word, or he could open himself to the opportunity to engage with Sam. If Sam seems interested in talking, then Jake's next action will be largely motivated by his personal values and his willingness to be present to Sam. Jake needs to begin here, with a desire to know Sam better before he can be compassionate. Once he learns about Sam's likes and dislikes, hopes and fears, Jake will have the opportunity to be



compassionate. This might mean heating up Sam's water so his tea is more enjoyable, or helping him fill out his meals for the next day.

Unfortunately it is not always easy to act compassionately. What barriers to compassion exist for your team? What things help you to act compassionately?

How can you help your team to find the time and space to alleviate the suffering of others?

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2019 W. F. Mitchell Bioethics Seminar

Supervised consumption services: What does the evidence say?



Canada's unprecedented epidemic of substance use-related morbidity and mortality has precipitated significant expansion of Supervised Consumption Services (SCS) and there are now more than 40 services operating across the country. What is the state of the science regarding these services? What has been the experience in jurisdictions where these services have been established? This presentation will provide an overview of the evidence on SCS and share Edmonton's experience implementing four of these services, including Canada's first SCS designed for acute care inpatients, located at the Royal Alexandra Hospital.

Dr. Elaine Hyshka is an Assistant Professor of Health Policy and Management in the University of Alberta's School of Public Health, and Scientific Director of the Inner City Health and Wellness Program at the Royal Alexandra Hospital in Edmonton. Dr. Hyshka's research focuses on advancing a public health approach to substance use in Canada, and is conducted in partnership with healthcare providers, non-profit organizations, and policymakers. She previously served as a core member of AMSISE, a community coalition that successfully implemented four supervised consumption services in Edmonton.

DATE: Monday, November 25, 2019

TIME: 2:00 pm – 3:00 pm

**PLACE: Pylypchuk Hall, level 0
St. Paul's Hospital**

This seminar is available via WebEx

WebEx link: [Click Here](#)

Meeting number (access code): 798 135 610

Meeting password: uj4g8YyH



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