

EDITORIAL

Where is caring in our nursing curriculum?

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Caring has long been claimed as one of the essences of various professional disciplines, aptly called helping professions, that directly improve the quality of human lives. Prominent among these helping professions are health-related disciplines, including Nursing, Medicine, Psychology, and other allied health disciplines. But caring is also present in other disciplines that are not within the health professions but are part of the helping profession, such as Education and Social Work. Although it is pervasively present and is asserted to be central to these various disciplines, it seems not apparent in the curriculum and not deliberately expressed as part of the disciplines' terminal graduate attributes.

Take the discipline of Nursing and the context of the Philippines as an example. Albeit caring has been asserted as the nursing's unifying domain (Leininger, 1988), primordial construct and consciousness (Ray, 2010), and its essence (Watson, 1985), it is not pronounced in the current version of the Philippine nursing curriculum nor any of the curriculum's past iterations. Deeper scrutiny of the present curriculum shows that caring is not evident nor explicitly expressed in the program outcome. The most prominent mention of caring in the current curriculum is the title of the courses offered for the degree program. How a concept that is considered the core of nursing and one of the elements of its disciplinary focus, the other being human health experience, be inadvertently overlooked in the curriculum is still a mystery. If caring was not deliberately considered or unintentionally left out in crafting the curriculum, its foundation might be resting on weak grounds. Caring as one element of the disciplinary focus of nursing orient future nurses to the unique disciplinary perspective of Nursing and the specific role nursing has in society. A professional discipline whose curriculum is not grounded on its essence is in danger of creating practitioners lacking a full grasp of their unique disciplinary knowledge and at risk of expressing knowledge borrowed from other disciplines as if it were their own. A curriculum like this is susceptible to produce nurses who could practice the skill of a nurse but cannot identify how it is to be a nurse, a nurse whose skills might be exceptional but whose sense of professional self is lacking.

Besides the seeming lack of grounding in caring in the nursing curriculum, caring is not explored in depth in most nursing courses. Despite the assertion that humans are innately caring, the knowledge of caring as expressed in nursing is not genetically transmitted. The expression of nursing knowledge as caring needs to be deliberately taught. Still, there seems to be a lack of focus on effectively educating future nurses on the nature, processes, and expressions of caring in nursing. If the tradition of letting student nurses learn caring only through incidental

experiences in the clinical area will continue, this will add to the persistent dissolution of the uniqueness of nursing as a discipline and the fragmentation of the nurses' professional identity.

Although the current context presents the gap that needs to be filled, it also presents itself as an invitation to reflect on the intended trajectory of the curriculum. There is always the opportunity to revisit and upgrade our curriculum to ground it in caring as one of its foundational philosophies, a move that entails accepting what has been done in the past and moving forward with the learnings of such experience.

When we persistently deny that there are concerns about the curriculum we believe is perfect, we are doing a great disservice to our discipline and its future practitioners.

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