

Compassionate Care is not just the right thing to do.

It is the smart thing to do because it is good business, a claim now backed up by sound scientific research.



Stanford University's Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education (CCARE)

The Healing Power of Kindness

By Lloyd Dean & James Doty, M.D.

We've all heard the old adage that an apple a day keeps the doctor away, but what about a smile?

An extensive scientific literature review sponsored by Dignity Health and conducted by the Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education (CCARE) at Stanford University reveals a growing body of scientific evidence that indicates kindness holds the power to heal. We now know that this often overlooked, virtually cost-free remedy has a statistically significant impact on our physical health. For example, the positive effect of kindness is even greater than that of taking aspirin to reduce the risk of a heart attack or the influence of smoking on male mortality. And it doesn't even require a trip to the pharmacy.

Those of us who work in the health care profession and study medicine have long believed in the value of a kind, compassionate bedside manner. But now, this belief isn't just a nice notion - it's sound science. The Dignity Health/CCARE scientific literature review shows that when patients are treated with kindness -- when there is an effort made to get to know them, empathize with them, communicate with them, listen to them and respond to their needs -- it can lead to the following outcomes:

- faster healing of wounds,
- reduced pain,
- reduced anxiety,
- reduced blood pressure,
- and shorter hospital stays.

The research also shows that when doctors and nurses act compassionately, patients are more likely to be forthcoming in divulging medical information, which in turn leads to more accurate diagnoses. They are more likely to adhere to their prescribed treatments, which leads to fewer readmissions.

The review also found that patients aren't the only ones who see better results from kind treatment -- the doctors, nurses, and caregivers who provide the kind treatment benefit as well. A kinder work environment helps employees feel more engaged and less exhausted, which is incredibly important to caregivers who often work long and unpredictable hours in high-pressure jobs.

In the weeks and months ahead, we plan to build on this research, and translate the findings into practices and guidelines health care providers, doctors, nurses, and other caregivers can follow during their interactions with patients.

So often, the debate about health care in America has focused on how to cut costs without restricting people's access or reducing the quality of their care. Well, institutionalizing kinder practices in hospitals, doctor's offices, and care facilities across the nation is a virtually free way of improving quality and generating better outcomes that can lead to even lower costs. It's a no-brainer.

At the very least, this research review proves that in the context of health care and medicine, kindness shouldn't be viewed as a warm and fuzzy afterthought, something nice to show after the "real" medicine is administered.

Instead, ***kindness should be viewed as an indispensable part of the healing process.*** After all, it's been in the Hippocratic Oath for over a century: "I will remember that... warmth, sympathy, and understanding may outweigh the surgeon's knife or the chemist's drug." So it's the responsibility of those who work and study in the field of medicine to remember the spirit of this pledge, and make acts of kindness not-so-random for the people we serve and heal every day.

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