Enacting caring presence in a conflicting environment: the case of state patients

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ABSTRACT

In today's fast-paced and often chaotic world, healthcare providers face numerous challenges in providing care and support to patients, particularly in settings where conflicts arise. One such complex scenario is the care of state patients, individuals who are mentally ill and have come into contact with the criminal justice system. In these situations, enacting a caring presence becomes crucial for promoting healing, understanding, and positive outcomes for both patients and society. The article delves into the exploration, review, and discussion of various techniques for enacting a caring presence in such situations, with the goal of transforming the care and well-being of state patients. It highlights the multifaceted challenges healthcare providers encounter while caring for this vulnerable population, emphasizing the importance of empathy, compassion, and understanding in their treatment. The article analyzes strategies like trauma-informed care, cultural sensitivity, and interdisciplinary collaboration, while stressing the significance of providing a safe and non-judgmental environment. Furthermore, it emphasizes the need for healthcare providers to prioritize their own well-being to avoid burnout. Ultimately, the article advocates for a more compassionate and understanding approach to mental health within the criminal justice system, envisioning positive changes in patients' lives and society at large.

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Introduction

State patients are individuals who face the unique intersection of mental health and legal matters. These people have been accused of committing a crime but are considered mentally unfit to stand trial. Consequently, instead of being incarcerated in a regular correctional facility, they are sent to psychiatric facilities or hospitals for assessment and treatment. This situation poses significant challenges to healthcare professionals as they navigate a complex landscape of legal intricacies, ethical dilemmas, and potential safety risks.

Providing care for state patients requires a delicate balance between addressing their mental health needs and adhering to the legal requirements imposed upon them. It is crucial for healthcare providers to acknowledge that state patients often have a complicated history of mental illness and trauma, which may have contributed to their involvement in the criminal justice system (Tadros et al., 2023). In such conflicting environments, it becomes essential for healthcare providers to establish a compassionate and caring presence to facilitate the therapeutic process (Du Plessis and Beurskens, 2021). This involves showing empathy, compassion, and active listening to address the patient’s needs and concerns. It goes beyond simply administering treatment; it creates an environment where state patients feel understood, valued, and respected. Research has shown that a caring presence positively impacts the therapeutic process and improves patient outcomes.

A systematic review by (Oukouomi Noutchie, 2019) emphasized the significance of the cultivation of caring presence in psychiatric settings. The review highlighted that a caring and supportive therapeutic relationship leads to improved patient satisfaction, better adherence to treatment, and overall well-being. Additionally, the concept of trauma-informed care plays a crucial role in the treatment...
of state patients. Given that these individuals may have experienced trauma before and during their legal encounters, they are particularly vulnerable to re-traumatization. Trauma-informed care approaches, as discussed by (Smith et al., 2021), focus on creating a safe and empowering environment that considers the impact of trauma on a person’s life and treatment needs.

The key questions examined in this article include:

i. What are the challenges faced by healthcare providers in providing care to state patients, who are mentally ill individuals involved in the criminal justice system?

ii. How can healthcare providers establish a caring presence in a conflicting environment where legal complexities, ethical dilemmas, and safety concerns intersect with mental health treatment?

iii. What role does empathy and understanding play in fostering a caring presence for state patients?

iv. How can collaborative care involving multidisciplinary teams improve the quality of care for state patients?

v. What measures can be taken to respect the dignity and autonomy of state patients, considering their unique legal status and mental health challenges?

vi. How does stigma and bias surrounding mental health and criminality impact the care of state patients, and how can healthcare providers address and combat these biases?

vii. What role does empathy and understanding play in fostering a caring presence for state patients?

viii. How does trauma-informed care contribute to the healing and recovery of state patients who may have experienced traumatic events?

ix. What are the long-term support needs of state patients, and how can comprehensive discharge plans facilitate successful community reintegration?

These questions form the basis for exploring the concept of enacting caring presence in the challenging context of state patients, aiming to provide insights into better care practices and support for these individuals within the healthcare system. The subsequent segments of the article thoroughly explore essential elements related to incorporating a compassionate approach in the care of state patients.

The Role of Empathy and Understanding in Healthcare for State Patients

Empathy and understanding, defined as the capacity to comprehend and share the emotions of others, play a pivotal role in delivering healthcare services, particularly when dealing with state patients - individuals who are entangled in the criminal justice system due to legal issues (Pescosolido et al., 2008).

The Significance of Empathy in Healthcare

Empathy serves as the cornerstone of patient-centered care, facilitating effective communication and fostering trust between healthcare professionals and patients. For state patients, the importance of empathy is heightened due to the unique challenges they encounter. Many of these individuals have experienced traumatic events, which can profoundly impact their physical and mental well-being (Feller and Cottone, 2003). Furthermore, involvement in the legal system can lead to feelings of isolation, shame, and stigmatization. Demonstrating empathy creates a safe and non-judgmental environment, encouraging state patients to express their concerns and actively participate in their healthcare journey.

Trauma and Its Impact on State Patients

A considerable number of state patients have faced traumatic experiences, such as abuse, violence, or neglect, which may have contributed to their legal involvement. Trauma can have long-lasting effects on mental health, leading to conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and complex trauma. Understanding the impact of trauma enables healthcare providers to approach these patients with sensitivity and offer appropriate support and interventions (Kira et al., 2012).

Addressing Mental Health Conditions

Mental health conditions are prevalent among state patients. According to a report by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, more than half of state and federal prisoners had a mental health problem (Bronson et al, 2017). Being well-informed about various mental health disorders and their manifestations is essential for healthcare providers to provide appropriate care and treatment options.

Breaking Down Stigma

State patients often face significant stigma, both within the criminal justice system and society at large. This stigma can deter them from seeking and receiving adequate healthcare. Healthcare providers who demonstrate empathy and understanding can help reduce this stigma by treating patients with dignity and respect, irrespective of their legal history (Corrigan and Watson, 2002).
Enhancing Communication and Cooperation

Empathy significantly enhances communication between healthcare providers and state patients. By showing genuine concern for the patient’s well-being and actively listening to their concerns, providers can create an environment where patients feel comfortable sharing crucial information about their health. This, in turn, enables more accurate diagnoses and more effective treatment plans.

Training and Support for Healthcare Professionals

To promote empathy and understanding in healthcare, it is crucial to provide ongoing training and support for healthcare professionals. Training sessions can focus on improving communication skills, fostering cultural competence, and developing a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by state patients. Additionally, offering support services, such as counseling and debriefing sessions, can help healthcare providers cope with the emotional toll of working with vulnerable populations.

Collaborative Care for State Patients

Collaborative care refers to a patient-centered approach that involves the coordination of diverse health-care professionals and stakeholders to provide comprehensive and integrated care for individuals with mental health conditions who are in the custody of the state. This approach acknowledges the interconnected nature of mental health issues with legal matters, social challenges, and economic factors in a person’s life. Therefore, it emphasizes the importance of a team-based approach that includes mental health professionals, legal experts, social workers, and other relevant stakeholders to effectively address the complexity of such cases (Tadros et al., 2023).

The Significance of Collaborative Care

State patients, who require mental health treatment while incarcerated or institutionalized, often present complex cases due to severe mental disorders such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and major depressive disorder. These conditions necessitate specialized and comprehensive care, making collaborative care essential. Collaborative care ensures a holistic approach by acknowledging that mental health conditions are rarely isolated; they are often intertwined with various aspects of an individual’s life. In dealing with state patients, the challenges are multifaceted, involving not only mental health issues but also legal issues, substance abuse, or social isolation. Bringing together a diverse team of professionals ensures that all these interconnected challenges are addressed effectively.

Moreover, collaborative care enhances communication among all parties involved in the treatment, including mental health professionals, corrections officers, legal representatives, and social workers. Establishing clear communication channels is crucial for the exchange of vital information, progress updates, and prompt responses to emerging concerns.

Furthermore, collaborative care plays a critical role in risk management. State patients can pose unique risks due to the severity of their mental health conditions. Through coordinated efforts, potential risks are identified and managed effectively, with strategies developed to prioritize the safety of the patient and the broader community. This comprehensive approach not only improves the treatment outcomes for the patient but also ensures a safer environment for all.

Key Components of Collaborative Care for State Patients

Effective collaborative care for state patients necessitates the integration of several key components to address their unique and complex needs adequately. At the core is the interdisciplinary team, which includes mental health professionals such as psychiatrists, psychologists, psychiatric nurses, legal experts, social workers, and other relevant stakeholders. Each team member contributes their specialized knowledge, enhancing the overall understanding of the patient’s needs and aiding in the creation of a comprehensive treatment plan.

Care coordination is another vital element, involving the organization and integration of the various aspects of a patient's treatment plan. It is essential to establish a centralized system for sharing information, setting goals, and monitoring progress to ensure that all professionals involved are aligned and collectively striving toward the patient's recovery.

Additionally, the development of individualized treatment plans is crucial. State patients present with diverse mental health conditions, and a standardized approach does not suffice. Treatment plans are tailored to the unique needs and circumstances of each patient, considering their mental health history, legal situation, and social support systems (Bond et al., 2020).

Finally, continuity of care is imperative, especially considering the transitions state patients may undergo from incarceration to community reintegration. Collaborative care facilitates a seamless continuum of care through these phases, from correctional facilities to mental health institutions and eventually to community-based support. This continuity is key to minimizing treatment disruptions and reducing the risk of relapse or other adverse outcomes.

Upholding Dignity and Autonomy in Healthcare

Respecting the dignity and autonomy of patients stands as a fundamental ethical principle in the field of healthcare. This becomes especially crucial when providing care for state patients, who are individuals dealing with mental health conditions and legal statuses that might make them feel disempowered and vulnerable. By recognizing their inherent worth and involving them in decision-making,
healthcare providers play a vital role in empowering state patients to actively participate in their journey of recovery and overall well-being (Azeem et al., 2011).

Dignity and Mental Health Care

Dignity is an inherent right of every individual, irrespective of their legal status, mental health condition, or social background. Within the context of mental health care, preserving the dignity of patients involves treating them with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. This principle finds its foundation in various ethical codes and human rights frameworks, including the World Health Organization’s Quality Rights initiative (Funk and Bold, 2020), which advocates for the rights and dignity of people with mental health conditions. For state patients, who often face multiple layers of vulnerability, preserving dignity becomes even more critical. These individuals may have encountered the criminal justice system due to their mental health condition and may experience stigma and discrimination as a result. As such, healthcare providers must adopt a non-judgmental and person-centered approach, recognizing the uniqueness and worth of each state patient they serve.

Autonomy and Informed Consent

Autonomy refers to an individual’s ability to make decisions about their own life and healthcare. It is an essential aspect of respecting a person’s individuality and self-determination. While some state patients may experience limitations in their decision-making capacity due to their mental health condition, it is vital to recognize and uphold their autonomy to the extent possible. In the context of mental health care, informed consent is a cornerstone of respecting patients’ autonomy. Healthcare providers must ensure that state patients are provided with clear and understandable information about their treatment options, potential risks, and expected outcomes. Even if a patient’s decision-making capacity is impaired, efforts should be made to involve them in the decision-making process to the greatest extent possible. In cases where a patient lacks the capacity to make specific decisions, healthcare providers should follow appropriate legal and ethical guidelines for surrogate decision-making, involving family members or legal representatives when necessary (Corrigan et al., 2014).

Empowering State Patients Through Collaboration

Empowering state patients involves fostering a collaborative and supportive relationship between health- care providers and patients. This approach encourages open communication, active listening, and involving patients in their care planning. By including state patients in decisions about their treatment, lifestyle choices, and goals, healthcare providers help them regain a sense of agency over their lives and well-being. Collaborative decision-making not only enhances the patient’s sense of dignity and autonomy but also improves treatment adherence and outcomes. When state patients feel respected and involved in their care, they are more likely to actively engage in their recovery journey and take ownership of their mental health.

Promoting Recovery and Reintegration

Respecting the dignity and autonomy of state patients goes together with promoting their recovery and successful reintegration into society. By acknowledging their worth as individuals, healthcare providers help reduce the stigma that state patients may face, both within healthcare settings and in the broader community. Moreover, empowering state patients to actively participate in their recovery process can lead to better treatment adherence, improved coping strategies, and increased resilience. These factors contribute to a higher likelihood of successful rehabilitation and reintegration into the community, reducing the risk of future encounters with the criminal justice system.

Addressing Stigma and Bias: Ensuring Equitable and Compassionate Mental Health Care for State Patients

The provision of care for state patients, individuals with mental health conditions who have also encountered the criminal justice system, can be significantly influenced by societal stigma and biases related to mental health and criminality. These negative attitudes often manifest within healthcare settings, impacting the quality of care and the overall well-being of state patients. To promote fairness and empathy in mental health care, healthcare providers must actively challenge and combat these biases. By prioritizing education, fostering acceptance, and encouraging patient-centered care, healthcare environments can become more compassionate and inclusive, leading to reduced stigmatization and improved experiences for state patients (Henderson et al., 2013).

The Impact of Stigma on State Patients

Stigma associated with mental health and criminality has profound effects on state patients, leading to discrimination, social isolation, and the internalization of negative self-perceptions. Encountering stigmatization within healthcare settings can discourage state patients from seeking or engaging in treatment, resulting in delayed or inadequate care. Moreover, biased attitudes from healthcare providers can hinder the therapeutic relationship between patients and professionals, impeding effective communication and collaboration. State patients may feel judged, misunderstood, or marginalized, causing hindered progress in treatment and contributing to feelings of hopelessness and helplessness (Sartorius and Schulze, 2005).
Actively Challenging Biases through Education

One of the most effective methods to address stigma and bias is through education. Healthcare providers should undergo training and workshops to increase their awareness and understanding of mental health conditions, criminal justice involvement, and the specific challenges faced by state patients. Education can dispel myths and misconceptions, replacing them with accurate information about mental health and its complexities. Gaining insights into the experiences and perspectives of state patients can help healthcare providers develop empathy and sensitivity, leading to a more compassionate approach to care. Additionally, education can shed light on systemic factors contributing to the criminalization of mental illness, prompting healthcare professionals to advocate for policy changes that prioritize mental health treatment over punitive measures.

Fostering an Environment of Acceptance and Understanding

Creating a supportive and accepting environment is crucial in combating stigma and bias within health-care settings. Administrators and leaders play a pivotal role in setting the organization’s tone, promoting a culture that values diversity and inclusivity. This can be achieved by developing policies that explicitly address stigmatization and discrimination and by implementing zero-tolerance policies for discriminatory behaviors. Fostering an environment of acceptance also involves encouraging open dialogue about mental health and challenging negative beliefs when they arise. Regular discussions about stigma and bias can prompt colleagues to reflect on their attitudes and language, fostering an atmosphere of mutual respect.

Promoting Patient-Centered Care

Patient-centered care is an approach that places the patient’s values, preferences, and needs at the forefront of the treatment process. For state patients, this means recognizing their unique challenges and experiences and tailoring care plans accordingly. By involving state patients in their care decisions and respecting their autonomy, healthcare providers validate their worth and agency, countering the effects of stigma-induced disempowerment. Patient-centered care also encourages a collaborative and non-judgmental approach to treatment, where healthcare providers work with state patients as partners in their recovery journey. This approach not only improves treatment adherence but also contributes to the cultivation of a caring and compassionate healthcare environment.

Importance of Therapeutic Communication

Effective communication is crucial in providing mental health care to individuals with mental health conditions who have also been involved with the criminal justice system. These individuals may have faced stigma, discrimination, and disempowerment, making compassionate and empathetic communication even more vital. Healthcare providers must approach state patients with clarity, empathy, and a non-judgmental attitude to create a safe and respectful environment. Key components of therapeutic communication include active listening and open dialogue, allowing state patients to express their thoughts, emotions, and concerns. This fosters a deeper understanding of their needs, enabling personalized and effective treatment plans (Makoul et al., 2007).

Addressing the Unique Needs of State Patients

State patients often experience multiple layers of vulnerability, dealing with both mental health challenges and legal complexities. Negative experiences within the criminal justice system can exacerbate feelings of isolation and mistrust. Therefore, therapeutic communication becomes essential in establishing a therapeutic alliance with state patients, helping them feel validated and supported (Douglass et al., 2023).

Creating an Empathetic and Safe Environment

To effectively communicate with state patients, healthcare providers must prioritize creating an empathetic and safe environment. This involves using clear language, avoiding medical jargon, and ensuring patients understand the information shared. Demonstrating empathy and compassion allows healthcare providers to connect with state patients on a deeper emotional level, acknowledging their experiences without judgment (Sirey et al., 2001).

Active Listening and Understanding

Active listening is a fundamental skill in therapeutic communication. It requires giving full attention to what the state patient is saying, acknowledging their feelings, and using verbal and non-verbal cues to show understanding and support. Through active listening, healthcare providers gain insight into the unique challenges and needs of state patients, vital in formulating individualized treatment plans. Understanding the social determinants of state patients’ mental health challenges helps address systemic issues and advocate for appropriate resources and support (Pinfold et al., 2005).

Promoting Collaborative Decision-Making

Collaborative decision-making is particularly relevant for state patients, given the intersection of their mental health needs and legal status. Involving state patients in the treatment planning process and respecting their autonomy empowers them to take an active role in their recovery journey. Through open dialogue, healthcare providers can understand the state of the patient’s goals, preferences, and fears, aligning the treatment plan with their values and aspirations. Collaborative decision-making enhances patient engagement and adherence to treatment, ultimately contributing to improved mental health outcomes.
Understanding Trauma-Informed Care

Trauma-Informed Care (TIC) is a crucial framework used in healthcare and human services, specifically designed to address the needs of individuals who have endured traumatic experiences, including state patients. This approach recognizes the widespread prevalence and profound impact of trauma on both mental and physical well-being. The primary objective of Trauma-Informed Care is to create a secure and supportive environment that fosters healing, recovery, and resilience. It acknowledges that trauma can result from a wide range of adverse events, such as abuse, neglect, violence, and other distressing situations. These traumatic experiences can have enduring effects on a person’s behaviors, emotions, and overall health (Sweeney et al., 2016).

Principles of Trauma-Informed Care

Implementing Trauma-Informed Care involves integrating several essential principles to establish a supportive and healing atmosphere for individuals who have experienced trauma (Harris and Fallot, 2001). At the forefront of these principles is prioritizing both physical and emotional safety, which is crucial for creating a psychologically secure environment. This safety allows patients to feel supported and confident as they navigate their healing journey, exploring traumatic experiences and emotions (Vitzthum et al., 2009).

Building trust between patients and caregivers is also fundamental. Patients need to believe that their concerns will be handled with respect and understanding, forming the foundation of a therapeutic relationship that encourages open communication and active engagement in the recovery process (Corrigan et al., 2014).

Furthermore, Trauma-Informed Care emphasizes empowerment and collaboration. Patients are actively involved in making decisions about their care and treatment plans, helping to restore a sense of control that trauma might have compromised. This collaborative approach ensures care is tailored to individual needs, incorporating input from healthcare providers, support staff, and patients themselves.

Cultural sensitivity is another critical component, recognizing the importance of understanding and respecting each patient’s unique cultural background and needs, which enhances the effectiveness of the care provided.

The approach is resilience-oriented, focusing on the strengths and coping abilities of patients. This perspective fosters a positive outlook and encourages patients to develop resilience, which is vital for overcoming the effects of trauma.

Lastly, preventing re-traumatization is a key goal of Trauma-Informed Care. Caregivers are vigilant to ensure that language, behaviors, and interactions are sensitive and do not inadvertently trigger or exacerbate trauma, thereby protecting patients from further harm.

Effectiveness of Trauma-Informed Care

The successful adoption of Trauma-Informed Care has been observed across various healthcare and social service settings. This approach has proven particularly effective in supporting survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, military trauma, and childhood abuse. By embracing Trauma-Informed Care principles, professionals contribute to the overall well-being and recovery of individuals who have experienced trauma, promoting healing and resilience throughout their journey towards a healthier and happier life.

Ensuring Long-Term Support

Taking care of state patients should extend beyond their immediate treatment period. Many of these individuals require continuous assistance even after their legal matters are resolved. To ensure their successful reintegration into society and prevent relapses, it is crucial to establish and implement comprehensive discharge plans that address various aspects of their well-being. This includes mental health needs, housing, employment, and social support networks. Rehabilitating state patients and helping them transition back into the community is a complex process that demands ongoing commitment from mental health professionals, social workers, and other relevant stakeholders. It’s important to recognize that their journey toward recovery doesn’t end with their release from institutional care; instead, it marks the beginning of a new phase where continuous support is essential for their sustained well-being (Moreno-Poyato et al., 2018).

Continuity in Comprehensive Mental Health Care

Continuing mental health care plays a critical role in the successful reintegration of state patients into the community. Even after their legal matters are settled, these individuals may still face challenges related to their mental health conditions. To address this, it is essential to create a comprehensive mental health care continuity plan that ensures ongoing support and treatment. This plan involves scheduling regular follow-up appointments with psychiatrists or therapists, allowing healthcare professionals to monitor their progress, assess their mental well-being, and make necessary adjustments to their treatment plans. By staying connected with the patients over time, mental health practitioners can identify potential triggers for relapse or emerging issues and intervene proactively (Bond et al., 2020). Additionally, ensuring access to appropriate medications and therapies is crucial, as state patients...
may need ongoing medication management to effectively address their underlying psychiatric conditions. Regular therapy and counseling sessions can also provide them with coping strategies and emotional support, enabling them to navigate challenges in the community more effectively.

Stable Housing and Supportive Living Environment

The availability of stable and supportive housing is vital for the successful reintegration of state patients. Leaving institutional care can be overwhelming, and without suitable housing options, individuals might face homelessness or end up in unstable living conditions, hindering their recovery progress. To prevent such situations, comprehensive discharge plans should include assistance in finding suitable housing options, such as halfway houses or supported living facilities. These environments offer structured living arrangements and varying levels of support based on the individual’s needs. They provide state patients with the necessary stability and guidance during their transition back into the community. Moreover, supportive living environments facilitate access to community resources and services, such as mental health clinics, vocational training centers, and social support networks. This interconnectedness significantly enhances the chances of successful reintegration and reduces the likelihood of relapse. By addressing housing needs and ensuring a stable living environment, state patients are better equipped to focus on their recovery and engage in other essential aspects of their rehabilitation process. The combination of continuous mental health care and stable housing establishes a solid foundation for successful community reintegration, improving the overall well-being of state patients and alleviating the burden on the mental health care system.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the significance of implementing a compassionate approach in the care of state patients cannot be overstated. Despite its challenges, this crucial endeavor has the potential to profoundly impact the lives of individuals facing complex and marginalized circumstances. Prioritizing empathy, collaboration, respect, and trauma-informed care enables healthcare providers to establish an environment that nurtures and supports the healing and rehabilitation of vulnerable individuals.

A key aspect of fostering a caring presence involves addressing the societal stigma and biases surrounding mental health and the criminal justice system. Negative perceptions and misconceptions about mental health can significantly affect the quality of care and support these patients receive. By challenging these prejudices and advocating for a more compassionate and understanding society, we can break down barriers and create a more inclusive and supportive environment for everyone, regardless of their circumstances.

The positive impact of a caring presence extends far beyond the individual patient. When compassionate care is provided, it contributes to the creation of a healthier and more harmonious community. Treating individuals with dignity and respect increases the likelihood of positive outcomes and successful reintegration into society, ultimately reducing recidivism rates and promoting a safer and more cohesive community for all.

It is crucial for healthcare providers, policymakers, and society to recognize the significance of caring for state patients in a humane and compassionate manner. By investing in resources, training, and support systems that prioritize empathy and understanding, we can reshape the landscape of mental health care and criminal justice for the better.

Embracing a caring presence not only transforms the lives of state patients but also reflects the values of a just and compassionate society. As we strive to build a world that values the inherent worth and dignity of all individuals, the pursuit of empathy and compassion in caring for state patients remains a critical step on this journey. Together, we can create a brighter and more hopeful future for those facing challenging circumstances and build a society that genuinely cares for the well-being of all its members.

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