HAVING THE COURAGE TO CARE - TO THE END

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How do we prepare ourselves to ensure that we are equipped to continue to provide palliative care, for those who need it, through death and into bereavement? Partly through education and training in palliative medicine, but also through our own awareness and understanding of what death means for each of us.

Working with people who are actively dying requires a huge degree of resilience, empathy and commitment as well as courage. Care professionals working daily to support people as they prepare for death can find this work emotionally and physically exhausting. Not only do we witness the life of another human being ending, we are also required to support the grieving family. And all of this whilst caring for a case load of many more terminally people.

In the UK, the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) challenged Nurses to review their code of conduct using “the 6 C’s of Care, Compassion, Competence, Communication, Courage and Commitment” Whilst many of the terms were familiar “Courage” is one term that seems at first sight to be a strange choice.

We see courage shown daily by the patients and families we care for, as they face impending loss, so at the end of their life it is important they have carers they can rely on; to work as their advocate; to provide their personal care; to maintain their dignity and to support their choices as to how and where to die.

According to the NMC “Courage enables us to do the right thing for the people we care for”. Courage gives us strength to carry on caring right through to the end, no matter what that end might look like.

In order to help build our courage, we first have to address our own understanding of death. Failure to be able to talk about these matters will severely hamper our ability to help people; even to open a conversation on matters such as, an advanced care plan, or whether they wish to be resuscitated will be difficult. Talking and thinking about our own mortality is essential in order to help us, to help others once they have been told they are now palliative and their time in this world is limited.

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