

Investigating the relationship between the perception of common humanity and compassion in healthcare workers

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Introduction

Compassion is a core value in healthcare. Currently, the underlying mechanisms of compassion are not well understood. The perception of common humanity has been proposed as the prerequisite for unbiased universal compassion. There is an absence of empirical research in this area. This PhD study was a world first exploration of the relationship between common humanity and compassion in a healthcare worker sample.

Aims

To gain a better understanding of the impact of common humanity material on healthcare workers' level of compassion.

Methodology

Seventy-five healthcare workers from Epworth HealthCare were randomly allocated to two groups. Each group viewed a different common humanity scenario (Danish TV2 Advertisement or Lifeguard interview). Healthcare workers completed validated scales on perspective taking, common humanity and compassion, prior to watching the common humanity scenario and immediately afterwards. Quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics, non parametric statistics, bivariate analysis and multivariate analysis.

The seventy-five healthcare workers were also provided with a one hour compassion training session which included:

- (i) information defining compassion
- (ii) Information from neuroscience showing that compassion is a positive mind state and different to empathy
- (iii) scenarios emphasizing common humanity
- (iv) common humanity slogan 'Just like this me, this person wishes to be happy and not to suffer'

Results

Pre-post intervention viewing different common humanity scenarios showed a statistically significant increase in level of compassion after viewing each common humanity scenario.

Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test Results

	Difference	Median (Pre, Post)	Z	Sig (2-tailed)	Effect size
Lifeguard group					
Perspective taking	0.14	3.86,4.14	3.83	0.001	0.59
Common Humanity	0.0	4.50, 4.50	1.05	0.293	0.16
Compassion	0.20	5.60, 6.0	3.51	0.001	0.55
Additional CH qns	0.0	4.50, 4.67	2.39	0.017	0.37
Danish TV group					
Perspective taking	0.28	3.86, 4.14	3.29	0.001	0.57
Common Humanity	0.25	4.50, 4.75	2.59	0.009	0.44
Compassion	0.20	5.60, 6.0	3.23	0.001	0.55
Additional CH qns	0.17	4.50, 4.67	3.27	0.001	0.56

Participant evaluation of the compassion training session:

Statement	Response rate (n=22)
Was it useful to have information on the neuroscience behind compassion?	73% said Yes
Was it useful to have information on compassion being a positive mind state whereas too much empathy can lead to burnout?	100% said Yes
Was it useful to view scenarios on common humanity?	82% said Yes
Was it useful to have the slogan 'just like me, this person wishes to be happy and not to suffer'?	82% said Yes

Conclusions

The results of this study provide evidence that common humanity appears to be the prerequisite for unbiased universal compassion. This has important implications for the future of compassion research and the design of compassion training programs, where it may be crucial to include content on common humanity.