Compassionate Care Initiative at the University of Virginia

Compassionate Care mural project
The Compassionate Care Mural Project was a collaborative undertaking to encourage creativity among health professionals and students; to promote activities that build resilience; and to support compassionate patient care.

For about ten minutes out of their busy days, UVA health sciences students, faculty, and UVA Health employees became artists. Each of the 98 participants in the project designed a 4x4 inch tile with a word chosen from a pot of stones inscribed with responses to the question “What does compassionate care mean to you?” All of the tiles were assembled to build the mural, a representation of creativity, collaboration, and compassion. The center remains open to hold the words and phrases that viewers of the mural have in mind to describe compassionate care.
MAKING THE MURAL: PART 1

For Part 1 of the project, containers were placed at locations in the School of Nursing, the Health Sciences Library, the UVA Health system, and online to collect responses to the question: *What does compassionate care mean to you?*

Within several weeks, participants contributed about 140 responses with over 200 words or phrases. These were condensed into a list of about 100 discrete words and phrases that represent compassionate care and were written onto small stones as gifts for participants in Part 2 of the project.
In 1-3 words, what does compassionate care mean to you?
MAKING THE MURAL: PART 2

Part 2 of the project was an inter-professional, collaborative effort to integrate the words and phrases from Part 1 into the design of 98 ceramic tiles. To do this, we took a vehicle known as the Compassionate Care Cart to seven units at the health system, the Health Sciences Library, and the School of Nursing to give staff and students a break from their busy days to nourish themselves and take part in the project.

On the cart, we brought supplies to paint the tiles, a pot full of the inscribed stones from Part 1, and healthy snacks for participants. In addition, a medical student took part in the cart rounds to share the soothing sounds of his ukulele. The process for designing the tiles was simple: participants first chose a stone with a word that resonated with them; they kept the stones as gifts but added the words they chose to the tiles with adhesive letters of different fonts and sizes; then they dripped various colors of alcohol inks over the tiles, and when the ink dried, the stickers were removed, revealing the letters shining through the mixture of colors. Each of the tiles is its own unique work of art as well as part of the collective mural.
MURAL INSTALLATION

With the help of UVA Facilities Management, the mural was carefully installed tile by tile. Later a glass shield was added for protection in the high-traffic area of McLeod Hall’s 2nd floor.
MURAL DEDICATION RECEPTION

A reception was held to celebrate the completion of the mural and the installation of new artwork on the 2nd Floor of McLeod Hall. Attendees included nurses, faculty, the Dean of the School of Nursing, and even the owner of the local business that donated the tiles. A group of nursing and medical students played music while attendees mingled, enjoyed refreshments, and looked at the art displays. It was a lively and engaging event to mark the installation of a vibrant representation of compassionate care, one of the major guiding principles at the School of Nursing.
LESSONS FROM THE PROJECT

The response to the mural project was overwhelmingly positive. On every cart round, we ran out of tiles, and staff and students alike expressed their gratitude for the chance to have a break and do something fun and creative. Staff members on one unit were at first in disbelief that we had included them, instead thinking that we had come for the patients. Students at the library, especially medical students, were pleased to have a moment away from studying. It was obvious that these cart rounds were addressing a major need for compassion and care for our present and future healthcare providers.

Not only did this project give staff and students a chance to relax and get creative, but it also helped bring various disciplines together around a common task. Nurses, doctors, patient care assistants, therapists, administrators, faculty members, and students worked and laughed together around the shared project space. So often in our healthcare system, communication and coordination within care teams is fragmented, so any opportunities we can offer to improve inter-professional collaboration not only benefit the team but also influence safe and quality care for patients.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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FUNDING & Co-SPONSORSHIP
Student Council Arts Fund
Compassionate Care Initiative, UVA School of Nursing
Compassionate Awareness Living Mindfully (CALM)
Virginia Tile & Stone

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