

UVA Compassionate Care Initiative responds: It's not okay to make fun of patients!

What you say, especially when you're a nurse, *really* matters. When registered nurses use cruel, dark humor to cope (["Nurses make fun of their dying patients. That's okay"; *The Washington Post*, 4-18-15](#)), they have failed their patients, whether their patients can hear them or not.

Nursing is the most trusted profession and is guided by a code of ethics, the first of which is respect for human dignity in *every* person. The article's take-home message that it's okay to make fun of patients is deeply unsettling and in direct opposition to our professional ethical code. Such callousness and incivility speak to a larger failing in our 21st century health care: the unmistakable stress of working in health care and the need to keep American RNs resilient.

Of all the health professionals, nurses spend the most time with patients and their families. Giving RNs the tools, time and space they need to care for themselves through ongoing challenges in today's healthcare environment is essential. So is teaching them how to do it.

Resilience isn't necessarily just something that comes; it's purposefully cultivated as self-care skills are prioritized and taught. Among our nursing students at the University of Virginia, it's interwoven into the curriculum and nurtured through a wide variety of activities from simple deep breaths and purposeful pauses to self-reflection, yoga, and time in nature.

But resilience cannot begin and end in nursing school; it's also up to the clinicians themselves as well as hospitals' managers and administrators to create healthy work environments and meaningful programming for staff to thrive. More centered and happier nurses means safer, more compassionate care. Fewer errors and infections. More satisfied patients and families. Better outcomes overall.

Laughter in healthcare is certainly a good thing, as is finding joy and connection in our shared humanness and vulnerability. Our nation's healthcare facilities must be places ruled by genuine empathy -- not cheap shots.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Susan Dorrie". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of "Susan" and "Dorrie" being capitalized and prominent.

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