Practical Tips for Engaging Staff and Transforming Cultures from Re-Igniting the Spirit of Caring

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*Re-Igniting the Spirit of Caring* (RSC) is a hands-on, experiential three-day program that re-energizes, renews, and re-engages participants with the joy, meaning, and purpose of their work in health care: providing compassionate care or service to patients, families, and colleagues.

In my work as a facilitator of RSC, I’ve discovered several practical things that all caregivers can do to reconnect or connect more deeply with their purpose:

- **Practice good self-care.**
  The ability to care for others is built upon the foundation of how well you care for yourself. Knowing your own unique needs and tending to your personal balancing of mind, body, and spirit are essential. Model self-care at work by making sure people get breaks and time away from work.

- **Engage others in conversations about caring.**
  Given the recent intensification of the nationwide focus on improving the patient experience, these conversations have never been more important. Use appreciative questions at department and unit meetings, in report, and in conversations in the hall and break rooms. Invite people into reflection with questions such as: “What are the behaviors that demonstrate caring?” “What do we want care to look and feel like for patients on our unit?” “What would we want for ourselves or our loved ones?” “Talk about a time when you provided care that you know made a real difference to a patient and family. What were the circumstances? What did it take?”

- **Dispel the myth that there isn’t time to really care.**
  Compassionate caring does not take more time; in fact, the case can be made that it saves time because when we truly know another, we are proactive in advocating for and meeting their needs. Compassion helps us to connect with and be fully present to another. It isn’t something more to do; it’s a way of being and it can become a way of doing. In order to cultivate a caring way of being, center yourself before entering a patient’s room while hand washing, by touching the door jam, or taking a deep,
mindful breath and committing to really making a connection: “I will be fully present to this person, right here, right now.”

- **Sit at the bedside for 5 minutes at the beginning of a shift and really connect.** Introduce yourself and explain your role and what you will be doing. See the patient and family as people and connect with them human-to-human. Ask the patient “What’s the most important thing I can do for you today?” Really listen and follow up. If you take the time to listen, you’ll save time in the long run.

- **Be authentic and create a therapeutic relationship with patients and their families.** This is much more than smiling and being nice, and it cannot be accomplished using scripted customer service language. It means engaging with a patient, wondering about what this experience means for them, and seeking to understand it through their eyes. Take ownership of how your actions and behavior will impact their ability to feel safe, cope, and heal.

- **Incorporate caring for colleagues into daily practices.** Start each shift in a staff huddle, having everyone say something about how they are today, and paying special attention for signs of distress or fatigue. Find ways to affirm and appreciate others’ contributions and acts of caring for patients and colleagues. Caring for colleagues helps us care for patients and families.

- **Language matters.** We distance ourselves from people when we refer to them with labels such as “the knee in bed 2,” the “frequent flyer,” or the “demanding family member.” Talking about people in ways that objectify them interferes with our ability to see them as people.

RSC participants experience and learn how to translate caring science into action that, when practiced daily, creates a caring culture and transforms the patient experience. Patients and families are seen as unique individuals with unique needs. Participants discover that caring is as important as the clinical and technical knowledge and skills they bring to their roles. Caring, often described as a “soft skill,” is far from soft and not optional. It is human connection and caring that help patients heal, feel safe, and cope with their illnesses. Human connection is what matters most in creating a positive patient and family experience and in helping staff find joy and meaning in their work.

The RSC curriculum is designed around the three key relationships in Relationship-Based Care: 1) relationship with patients and families, 2) relationships with colleagues, and 3) relationship with self. RSC is seen as an effective way to help team members in all disciplines and from all levels within the organization to engage, internalize, and own the purpose and meaning in their practice that results in an
alignment with the organization’s values, mission, and goal of transforming the culture into a caring and healing environment.

*Re-Igniting the Spirit of Caring* is aimed directly at improving relationships, and relationships are the foundation for everything that happens in an organization. When relationships are better everywhere in an organization, staff engagement and commitment improve, teamwork improves (even across disciplines and departments), and patients and families experience the difference. When people spend time connecting with each other, environments are transformed.

You can learn more about *Re-Igniting the Spirit of Caring* at [www.chcm.com/services/re-igniting-the-spirit-of-caring/](http://www.chcm.com/services/re-igniting-the-spirit-of-caring/).