BOOK REVIEW

See Me as a Person: Creating Therapeutic Relationships With Patients and Their Families

In See Me as a Person: Creating Therapeutic Relationships With Patients and Their Families, authors Mary Koloroutis and Michael Trout have written a most remarkable book that gives substance and meaning to the concept of using oneself as a therapeutic tool. At a time when it seems that nursing programs have shifted toward valuing instrumental and technical aspects of nursing over relational skills and caring, Koloroutis’s and Trout’s voices are desperately needed.

Nursing programs must engage in careful planning to ensure a focus on relevant, timely, and essential content that will best prepare students for the future. Following the Institute of Medicine’s report, recommendations to increase the focus in nursing curricula on quality and safety competencies have been strongly encouraged (Sherwood & Barnsteiner, 2012). When something new is added, something else must be reduced or eliminated. Curriculum time spent on developing softer relational skills might be seen as negotiable. Indeed, today’s nursing student might even prefer practicing high technical skills learned in simulation while working safely with mannequins who do not have a life story to tell, a culture to respect, or even a different perspective to consider. Students might come to believe that relational skills are less important than technical skills and safety competencies.

Therefore, it is essential that those of us who teach communications and the relational aspects of nursing care select resources that will have the most potential to influence the development of relationship-based values and skills. For nursing educators who are concerned that emphasizing technical skills at the expense of relational skills is happening in your curriculum, it may be that this book can help to restore the balance by reestablishing the credibility and value of relationships in the minds and hearts of students.

A nursing educator’s choice of a textbook for a course is serious business because it provides the foundation for what student nurses are expected to learn and use in their future practice as well as a profound influence on the development of students’ identity. This importance necessitates careful scrutiny of what the book has to say about the profession of nursing and the way in which one practices nursing (Potter, 2010).

Selection of a nursing textbook involves examining it for relevant content and other features that enhance readability. The 431 pages of See Me as a Person are easily read, with plenty of organizational headings and bulleted and sufficient white spaces to make it an organized read. Tables, diagrams, charts, and pictures supplement the content and aid in conceptualization. Chapter summaries highlight key points and reinforce learning. Those familiar with communication content will find concepts and ideas congruent with those in other texts on therapeutic
communication, but they will also find differences. It is in the differences that this book’s value for the education of student nurses can be found.

Unlike the language of certainty and technical rationality found in other textbooks, which may actually discount the value of relationship and even objectify people (Hiraki, 1992; Nickel, 1997), this book does not focus on the presentation of technical knowledge or skills in the absence of a human context. Although there is a great deal of practical information in this book (indeed, suggestions abound), there are no rules of right or wrong. Instead, what students will learn is that there is a framework they can use that captures the elements of connecting with other human beings found in the practices of “wondering,” “following,” and “holding,” which the authors develop in the chapters that follow. This means that students will not come away with a sense that there is only one way of relating to patients. When they meet patients, they can be authentic, knowing that they too are relational beings who are curious about the Other.

Through the use of stories, narratives, and poems, readers will be able to experience authentic and meaningful examples of how relationships, or the lack of them, make a difference in people’s lives. Student readers will experience the freedom to begin to reflect on their own ways of being with patients and are invited to make them more meaningful.

Much of this book involves encouraging self-reflection, and readers who consider the many reflective questions at the end of each chapter may actually feel as if they are in a dialogue with the authors. This book is a safe place for nursing students to learn by themselves or in the classroom with others. There is respect for the capacities and knowing that students bring with them to the reading, and there is an absence of judgment regarding what the student takes away. There is, however, consistent and gentle encouragement to help the reader believe in the transformative power of relationship and to develop one’s own potential to enact caring, relational nursing that only improves through the use of continuing self-reflection on practice.

A key finding from the Carnegie study (Benner, Sutphen, Leonard, & Day, 2009) of undergraduate nursing education was that there is growing need to promote formation of student’s professional identity rather than to merely socialize students or help them take on nursing roles while we educators evaluate their performance. See Me as a Person is a textbook for relationship-based care that supports the knowledge on which nursing is based while helping students formulate their identities on the relational premises on which nursing rests.

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REFERENCES


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