

Dr Amy Taylor

Defining compassion and compassionate behaviours in radiotherapy

Abstract

Inadequate care and compassionate practice have been blamed for failings within the NHS. UK healthcare legislation can be criticised for its failure to provide meaning or clarity of practical compassionate care. Consequently, hindering the ability of NHS Trusts, service delivery managers and employees to interpret and implement policy recommendations regarding compassionate practice at a local level. To support the implementation of compassionate legislation, the study sought to understand the perspectives of those in receipt and those delivering compassionate practice. The research aimed to co-construct a context specific definition of compassion and identify commonly recognised compassionate behaviours.

Co-production underpinned the qualitative methodological inquiry and design of the research. Eleven focus groups were conducted, five with therapeutic radiographers, three with cancer patients and carers and three with student therapeutic radiographers. On completion of thematic analysis from those groups, three co-production workshops were conducted, integrating the data to ensure the co-produced findings were equally representative of the perspectives of the three participant groups.

The co-produced definition conveys how compassion can be recognised by the intention to help, achieved through recognition of individuality and a tailored approach to meet the person's individual need. An understanding of compassionate display is illustrated through the construction of a conceptual framework. The findings indicate four components are essential for compassion demonstration and perception of compassionate display: 1) attitude, 2) behaviours, 3) understanding individuality and the appreciation of needs and 4) practices. Collectively these four components enable the therapeutic radiographer to behave in a manner which facilitates a connection with the patient whilst denoting their intent to be compassionate. Consequently, expression of intent enables the patient to perceive the practices as compassionate.

This co-produced definition, underpinned by a conceptual understanding of compassionate display, will facilitate the translation of policy into practice. Recommendations are made which aim to equip the profession with therapeutic radiographers that hold intent to be

compassionate, are motivated and have both the confidence and opportunity to be compassionate in a supported culture which shares the vision for person-centred compassionate care. Consequently, this should improve the quality of compassionate care received by patients.