



Compassion at the heart of well-being: an interdisciplinary study of well-being in a healthcare setting

Every day, frontline healthcare staff are asked to provide quality care in environments that often involve stress, emotional overload, overwork and tiredness. This can seriously compromise their psychological well-being. Further, compassion – the ability and desire to empathise and care for someone who is suffering – is vital for the functioning of healthcare services and yet, how can people who are confronted day after day by human suffering maintain compassion towards those for whom they are expected to care?

This project asks two central questions: ‘How important is compassion for promoting well-being in the self and others?’ ‘How can both well-being and compassion be enhanced?’

The researchers will explore what well-being and compassion are from a variety of cultural and philosophical perspectives, the relationship between compassion and well-being, how they can be measured, and the reciprocal effects of compassion for the self and compassion for others.

At seven Sydney Local Health District sites, nursing staff will be asked about their understanding and experience of well-being and compassion and how these function in their day to day work both for their own and their patients’ well-being. Their patients will also be asked about their experience of compassion during their care and its effect on their well-being.



The research team will also develop, implement and compare two training programs designed to increase nurses' compassion and ability to nurture well-being both for themselves and others. One training program will be based upon contemplative techniques such as mindfulness while the other will use more goal-focused techniques drawn from positive psychology. Both approaches are expected to help relative to the wait-list control group, although in different ways and for different people. The research will collect data from individual nurses, their colleagues and their patients to discover how the training impacts their professional and personal lives, from their own well-being to their relationships at work, their care for their patients and the 'ripple' effect of any impacts into their wider social networks.

This project examines the effects of compassion in health care settings, and will compare two different training programs for nurses designed to increase compassion for self and others.

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