

Title: A measure of compassion in health care students

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It appears with the increasing expansion of the role of the health care workers as well as advances in technology, health care may have lost some of its previous emphasis on compassion. The importance of compassion as a core attribute of health care has been highlighted by a recent worldwide movement (political and professional). However, in New Zealand, the word 'compassion' is rarely mentioned in major policy documents or professional competency guidelines.

Compassion is often compared to empathy, altruism, mindfulness and sympathy. Compassion, however, also involves sensitivity to self and others, as well as motivation to action with a goal. There are theoretical approaches to compassion, there is a neurobiological basis, but to measure compassion and its impact in the context of health care is difficult. Components of compassion include instrumental (psychomotor skills, behaviour and knowledge, cognitive) and expressive (affective, emotional, motivational and interpersonal) aspects.

The purpose of the study is to measure the perception of compassion amongst students in a variety of health care degree programmes. Quantitative data will be collected using a 'Compassion for Others Scale' administered to three different cohorts of students in two health care degree programmes (nursing and social work). We will present preliminary findings from our research that shows the compassion perceived by the students at different levels of their education. This will allow comparison between different cohorts of students and could lead to the expansion of the project into a longitudinal study. This presentation will be of interest to others teaching health-related programmes.