



Healing effects of compassion

Erin Carr

Abstract: Our patients are the ones who have lived in their body through the ups and downs of their injuries; pain, and emotion come with this. We must work together, creating a plan of action and begin a targeted treatment that is meaningful. When a patient senses the healthcare practitioner is invested in them, true healing can begin.

Indexing Terms: chiropractic; physical therapy; compassion; patient-focussed care.

Compassion is more than an ethical code of conduct taught to healthcare practitioners. It can truly help practitioners have a better understanding of their patient's history, current situation and future recovery. All of which contribute positively to their longer-term healing.

When a patient has a physical injury, their injury and pain trigger a cascade of physiological responses. With an output of various emotions: anger, frustration, sadness, anxiety, or depression to name a few. Similar emotions one may experience during the stages of grief. One or some of these emotions may emerge over the course of healing.

Whether an acute or chronic injury, you having compassion is essential to help your patient through both the physical and emotional aspects of an injury. When health care practitioners have more compassion for their patients it may start a more positive trusting relationship between the two aiding in the healing process.

Compassion came to me early in my career, as a young clinician working in busy clinics. Where just as much time was spent doing paperwork as it was with patients. I questioned how much my treatments were actually helping patient recovery. How could the 20-30 minutes of time spent be positively and effectively influencing their healing? Although the time was brief I quickly learned that *listening* to their history, individual needs and goals was essential. This meant understanding what did and did not work for them in the past which made my treatments meaningful, not just a routine in their personal recovery.

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Whether the patient case was straight forward or highly complex this empathy and compassion had patients dedicated to each of their sessions. They became more willing to work as a team to achieve their goals.

I found that compassion and empathy may instigate the parasympathetic response which triggers the body's own ability to heal. A central component to long-term recovery.

One example compassion comes into play regarding a group of patients: those who present with hypermobility, anywhere from mild to severe. These individuals are often misdiagnosed or understood. They usually present with muscle tightness in large muscle groups, pain at rest and decreased pain with activity. They often have underlying laxity in certain ligaments as well as smaller group muscle weakness. The larger muscle group tightness acts as a protective mechanism that may be overlooked by some practitioners, leading to incorrect (and ineffective) treatments.

These patients may be provided inaccurate information, exercises or poor hands on treatment. They may be told to stretch and roll out their larger tight muscles or do exercises that are too advanced given their body's unstable nature. Unfortunately, these activities often flare these individual's hypermobility and pain which then impairs their functional capacity, forcing a step backwards in healing. And the patient possibly desiring to seek a second opinion.

Often times these patients have already been to multiple practitioners, having told their story many times and feel they have not been heard. They may be tired and frustrated in this process.

Having compassion involves patience and an understanding for what they have been through and their concerns when seeking help from *yet another* healthcare practitioner. Compassion means understanding that patients often know their body better than anyone else and that no matter how much experience we the health care provider may have, sometimes dropping our own ego of knowledge in order to really hear the patient is essential.

Our patients are the ones who have lived in their body through the ups and downs of their injuries; pain, and emotion come with this. We must work together, creating a plan of action and begin a targeted treatment that is meaningful. When a patient senses the healthcare practitioner is invested in them, true healing can begin.

The original reason most people want to go in health care is to do one thing, help. Patients seeking out treatment from a healthcare professional is to feel better and get back to a normal quality of life.

When we get back to these basics, compassion comes naturally.

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About

Dr. Erin Carr is the founder and owner of Dr. Carr Integrative Physical Therapy. She believes the body has the ability to heal on its own. The foundations of her treatments blend western and eastern techniques. By applying her whole-body treatments with intuitive skill and targeted focus, she is well known for helping performers, artists, athletes and everyday people of all ages return to optimal function.