The Artistry of Compassion:  
The Elephant that Lingers in the Room

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I’ve learned that people will forget what you’ve said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.

Maya Angelou
Compassion

- Emphasis on data collection & technical skills
- Distract from focusing on human bond of compassion
- Core value in oncology social work
- Highlight Compassion in the 2019 “American Cancer Society Quality-of-Life Lecture”
Oncology Social Workers

- Clinician, supervisor, administrator, researcher, educator, advocate
- Proximity to profound human dilemmas
- Witness to suffering
- Likelihood for compassion fatigue
• Each patient needs an individualized approach

• A helping hand over his or her rocky road

• Compassion requires foresight to know when to lend a steadying hand.
• Compassion: Caring, listening, kindness, dignity, respect, cultural competence, cultural humility

• Empathy: The ability to walk in another’s shoes

• Compassionate care vs. ordinary care

• Teachable skills
Compassion

• Essential for:
  • Oncology social workers
  • People living with cancer
  • Colleagues, student interns & interprofessional team
Challenge of Digital Compassion

- Integration of digital technology in our work
- Novel opportunities for patient-centered communication
- Email, texting, web-based platforms, webcasts & online support groups
- Balance between compassion & technical expertise

Who Teaches Us Compassion

- Parents, guardians, partners, spouses, family, siblings & friends
- Professors, teachers, mentors, supervisors, colleagues & co-workers
- Patients, survivors, caregivers & the bereaved
- Interprofessional oncology/palliative team
- Everyone
• Anticipated & unanticipated mentors
• Role models for compassionate care
• Throughout the trajectory of our careers
Enhances our interventions

Compassion as a buffer or antidote to stress

Enriches our personal & professional lives

Patients welcome caring from clinicians

Invaluable in psychosocial oncology
Bumps in the Path

It may look like a straightforward bridge, but bumps in the path can trip anyone. Need a compassionate helping hand.


Thank You

My sincere thank you to the American Cancer Society, Association of Oncology Social Work, and all of you, great AOSW colleagues and staff for being here and listening.