Integrity in Nursing: A Self Reflection of Cultural Competence

Emily Kropfl

Duquesne University

16 March 2018
Has there ever been time that you’ve stood up for something that is right, even when others told you not to?

Recognizing the distinct purpose of a nurse – to serve as a patient advocate – is a driving force in my life now as a nursing student as I attempt to navigate the waters of right versus wrong in my field of practice. Thinking back to my past employment over the years in nursing school, I can recall many times where I have been faced with moral dilemmas. An example of a time I stood up for something that is right, even when others told me not to, is the time I stood up for an elderly patient during previous employment at a nursing home. I was previously employed as a “Student Nurse Assistant” in an Alzheimer’s/Dementia facility in my hometown. With this role I was not given much responsibility medical wise…I was more of patient companion/patient sitter. Through this role I came to know each resident on a personal level, identifying and coming to love the quirks and oddities of each and every resident. When it came to one specific patient – we will call her Jane Doe – I seemed to be the only staff member that “loved” her quirks. While she was loud, energetic, a bit off the wall, and sometimes rude, Jane Doe was dealing with a disease that she had no control over. It appalled me that I seemed to be the only staff member who recognized Jane Doe’s good qualities despite the poor qualities that the disease brought out of her.

As the Fourth of July neared, a firework extravaganza was planned for the elderly members of the facility. As I helped wheel members out to the courtyard to watch the firework show, the Activity Director who planned the event informed me that Jane Doe was not permitted to watch the firework show outside with the rest of the residents because she was considered “disruptive.” I viewed this as an injustice in the mode of discrimination… How can you tell one person – a person who is still in a right enough state of mind to recognize the injustice occurring – that they are not permitted to enjoy the holiday festivities? With the little joy left in this elderly woman’s life, I could not bear to see this discrimination occur. I went to my immediate supervisor – the nurse on duty – who informed me that she did not have time to deal with this issue. Unsatisfied with this answer, I sought out the Charge Nurse and explained the issue to her. Upon her permission, I boldly escorted Jane Doe outside to the dissatisfaction of the Activity
Director. After being verbally reprimanded by the Activity Director, the Charge nurse stood up for me and Jane Doe. I am happy to say that I sat with Jane Doe during the entire show, enduring her loud, energetic, and off the wall comments with joy and pride knowing that I did the right thing in fighting for her justice.

I argue that the key to standing up for something that is right in the face of adversity and injustice is being confident in one’s own beliefs and having a strong sense of right and wrong. This confidence takes self reflection, as well as strong morals and values… however, by taking the time to know one’s own beliefs and values, one has the ability to decipher when an injustice is occurring, as well as the power to persevere in the pursuit of equality.

**What are some of the biggest needs in your school or community? What are some ways that you can be a part of a solution to those crises?**

As a future nurse, I have been trained to seek out disparities around me and strive to fix them. Over my time spent at Duquesne, I have noticed that one of the biggest needs within my community now is the need for food and shelter among the homeless population in Pittsburgh. This has become extremely evident to me throughout my three years of school in this city as I have seen first hand the poverty and destitution that is so prevalent and common in the downtown and surrounding areas. While I see this issue first hand on my daily drive to and from school, the most striking moment that I recognized this problem occurred this past December. As I was leaving my house in Southside to head home for the Christmas break in my warm car with a coffee in hand, I was complaining to myself that the snow currently falling would slow down my commute home. As I looked out my window driving down East Carson Street, I saw a man in a sleeping bag curled up on the sidewalk as snow fell from the sky onto him. I was so ashamed… How dare I complain about the weather being a *slight inconvenience* for me when there are people *living their lives* this way? I think it is eye opening moments like these that remind fortunate people like myself the importance of seeking solutions to such prevalent crises.

I am blessed to have grown up in a family that has placed great value and
importance on service to one’s community. I was raised on the idea of “to whom much is
given, much is expected.” Through my parish at home, my dad was in charge of
gathering volunteers for our local soup kitchen. This means that every third Saturday of
the month my family was volunteering. What began as “something my dad forced me to
do on a Saturday morning” became one of the driving forces of my passion for social
justice. Because of this passion, I have continued volunteering at my hometown soup
kitchen, and have sought out opportunities here at school to seek justice for the homeless
population as well. There is a soup kitchen in the Hill District (Jubilee Soup Kitchen) that
I have volunteered at as a mode of continuing this service while away from home, and
freshman year I joined Duquesne’s Saint Vincent De Paul Society, whose mission is
personal service for the poor. Numerous times I have participated in Duquesne St.
Vincent De Paul service event, the “Sunday Night Homeless Ministry,” which is weekly
act of service performed through the organization that allows members to hand deliver
meals to the homeless downtown every Sunday night. The ministry assembles to-go box
dinners with the left over dining hall food to be distributed directly to those in need. This
project allots its volunteers the opportunity to help the hungry and lonely alike through
discussion opportunities with those on the streets.

While volunteering is one way to strive for a solution to the injustice of poverty,
awareness is equally as important. By bringing awareness to the issue of homelessness,
the community can come together to strive for a solution.

When do we let our present concerns blind us to the needs of others? Who around us might
we help if only we took the time to see them and to understand them?

I believe that we let our present concerns blind us from the needs of others quite
often. In particular, I think people are most often ignorant to the needs of those closest to
them because of the self centered digital age we live in. Society has been trained to be
selfish – in particular college students. Therefore, this response will be focused from the
perspective of a college student.

College has trained me to be selfish. I have been trained to schedule my classes at
times that fit in around my work schedule that I will write in my planner… a schedule
that is dictated by an alarm that wakes me up in the morning with just enough time to get
myself ready and out the door to attend a class that I will study for later during my free
time that is centered around concern for my future. With my face in my phone and laptop
during the in between times, it is truly a wonder I even know that there is an outside
world around me.

It is imperative to my contribution to society as a decent human being that I
recognize this major flaw in my life so that I may identify the impact of my actions not
only in my life, but the lives of others as well. I have learned that when I simply mute my
present concerns, or at least minimize them to appropriate times, I am able to truly see the
needs of others around me. I am able to recognize that my roommate’s struggle with
school is bigger than just not understanding concepts in class, but is perhaps stemming
from her mental health disorder that needs proper attention. I am able to be present in
family relationships and call those who are close and important to me… my grandparents
and siblings… to let them know how much they mean to me and show interest in their
needs and struggles. I am able to show compassion to the beggar on the street who may
not be “just begging for drug money,” but may actually be trying to feed his family. By
simply looking past my own present concerns, I am able to exist with a purpose greater
than myself. Looking past my own needs allows me to see the needs of others and use
this perspective to serve and positively impact those around me.

Whose stories are we unwilling to listen to lest they require greater sacrifice from us?

I believe that society leans away from listening to the stories of those who are
outcasts… of those who do not “fit the mold” of what our civilization labels as normal.
Doing so would require a sacrifice from the us… it would require us to step out of our
comfort zone, tarnish our image, and perhaps realize a truth that we are not ready to hear.
We are unwilling to listen to the truths of these individuals because the differences
among “us” and “them” lead to a self reflection that causes us to acknowledge our own
shortcomings and flaws. I know from personal experience that this point is true. An
example of this point that I have struggled with throughout my life is how I deal with
people who beg for money on the street.

After much self reflection, I have come to determine that it is difficult for me to
face the man begging on the street and listen to his point of view because it reminds me
of my inadequacies as an advocate and activist for social justice. He reminds me that I have more than I deserve, and that I do not do enough to help those in his position… that I do not do enough to seek an end to his suffering. I have reflected on why it is much easier to throw a couple dollars his way than engage in conversation, and have come to decide that this service (or disservice, as one may call it) safeguards me from making the “greater sacrifice” of giving my time, heart, and love of Jesus. It saves me time, as the few seconds it takes to dig out change is a smaller disruption to my day than a full blown conversation. It protects me from the unwanted attention of pedestrians passing by. It shields me from the harsh reality that this man is facing… one that I have never experienced first hand. This said “protection” that these selfish actions grant me is what truly prevents me from listening to this population’s stories.

I believe that society has been groomed to think as a “me” generation... meaning that our society has taught us to be so focused on our own lives and *conveniences* that we come to take every shortcut we can get. By listening to the stories of those who are different than us… of those who face struggles, adversity, ridicule, and suffering… we can bear the “greater sacrifice” that listening may bring so that we may truly *hear* the needs, passions, outlooks, and wisdom of those who can help us become better versions of ourselves.