

numa

caring for the spirit in island health

HUMILITY IN HEALTH CARE

If this pandemic has done anything it has humbled us. Humbled us from thinking that we are invincible and invulnerable. Humbled us to realize just how much we need each other and that we do not have all the answers for what life throws at us. No one enjoys being humbled. As health care staff we pride ourselves on knowing our professional competencies. We like knowing things and being in control of our work. Saying that we *don't know* something is hard for us. Part of our negative reaction to humility may be because we link humility with being humiliated. But the two do not need to go hand in hand.

The word humility has its root in the Latin word *humus* (earth). To be humbled then has this sense of being brought down to earth or, more positively, becoming grounded. Even the word human is related to this same root. We, as human beings, are "of the earth". We are creatures who



move through life with our feet on the ground. In this sense then a humble posture is a natural part of what it means to be human.

Humility in a health care context is about having a posture where we recognize that there are things we do not know and things that we need to learn. It is about understanding that we do not know everything about the people we meet and care for (or work with!). We do not know what they have been through and how those experiences affect them on a daily basis. We do not know what they believe or value and how those beliefs and values might shape their desires for health care. Humility means recognizing that we don't know their spirituality or cultural practices and how those might help them find meaning and purpose for what they are going through. Humility invites us to understand, as H. Jackson Brown Jr states, that "every person you meet knows something that you don't. Learn from them."

Despite being the bright people that we are

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H. Jackson Brown Jr.

there is no way that any of us can know every detail about each culture, tradition or background that we may encounter. There is no way we can know about the unique pieces that make each person who they are. And it's precisely because of this reality that humility is so important. Humility helps us order to hear their story so that we can know how to best care for them. Humility is about being open to another person's sharing of what they need and what will be supportive and helpful to them. With this in mind humility is a core competency for all health care professionals.

For Spiritual Health Practitioners every encounter with a patient, loved one or staff person is a moment of learning. There is no one else in the world like them. Their concerns and joys are unique to them. Their struggle in that moment is theirs and theirs alone. Spiritual Health Practitioners are invited into these conversations to explore, to hold, to journey with, in order to, hopefully, move to a place of healing and wellness.

The delightful thing is that we don't remain in a sphere of unknowing. As we humble ourselves and ask questions and learn, new opportunities for care will open up. People will be heard and understood and thereby valued and supported. Practicing with humility opens the door to our own self learning and greatly improves our ability to offer the best care possible.

NUMA (Greek for "spirit/breath") is produced by Island Health's [Spiritual Health](#) team to draw awareness to issues of spirituality in health care. The editor of numa is Darren Colyn, Spiritual Health Leader.

To learn more visit the Spiritual Health Professional Practice page and to read past issues of NUMA go to the [Spiritual Health public webpage](#)

A Blessing for Humility

May the gift of humility be yours.

*May the weighty call to Omniscience be stilled
and the gentle whisper of Inquiry be all you hear.*

*May you be released from
Controlling, Dominating,
Telling and Assuming.*

*May Asking and Listening be the twin sails
that guide you to the other's sacred shore.*

*May all of Humility's children surround you:
Curiosity to guide you in finding out more.
Gentleness to ensure you do no harm.
Understanding to bridge all gaps.*

May Safe Presence become your new name.

*May your capacity to humbly listen
be a resting place where,
anxieties are eased,
experiences are held,
hopes are shared,
traditions honoured,
and beliefs valued.*

*When you encounter another
May the unknown in the space between you
Become fertile earth where
the seed of understanding takes root
and connection grows.*

May the gift of humility be yours.

D. Colyn