

Conversations for Kindness

Detoxifying healthcare: Leading practically with and for kindness

20 July 2023

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Context - Conversations for Kindness

About the movement

Conversations for Kindness is a monthly virtual meeting that was set up in the summer of 2020 by eight colleagues and friends working in healthcare across Sweden, the UK and the USA: Bob Klaber, Dominique Allwood, Maureen Bisognano, Goran Henriks, Suzie Bailey, Anette Nilsson, Gabby Matthews and James Mountford. The purpose of the meeting was to have some time together to continue some initial conversations around kindness, and its role at the 'business end' of healthcare, and to plan interactive workshops on this topic.

Conversations for Kindness

- Monthly Zoom call on the third Thursday of every month (6-7pm GMT)
- A focus on listening, learning, thinking differently and mobilising for action
- An open culture of sharing of resources, energy and ideas

If you would like to join the conversation for kindness, please complete [this contact form](#)

Who did we hear from?

This month, we discussed practical applications of kindness, specifically breaking the rules and telling a meaningful story. While the majority of this session was discussion-based, we did have two convenors who guided us through our time together:



Our convenors for this session:

Gabrielle Matthews

Gabrielle is a member of the NHS Youth Forum. While studying as a medical student at Imperial College School of Medicine, she also serves as a member of the NHS Assembly.

Maureen Bisognano

Maureen is the President Emerita and Senior Fellow at the Institute for Healthcare Improvement. She advises health care leaders around the world and is an instructor of Medicine at Harvard Medical School

This insights pack summarises the session, but you can also [watch the event on YouTube](#)

*Kindness in
healthcare*

Small Kindnesses by Danusha Laméris

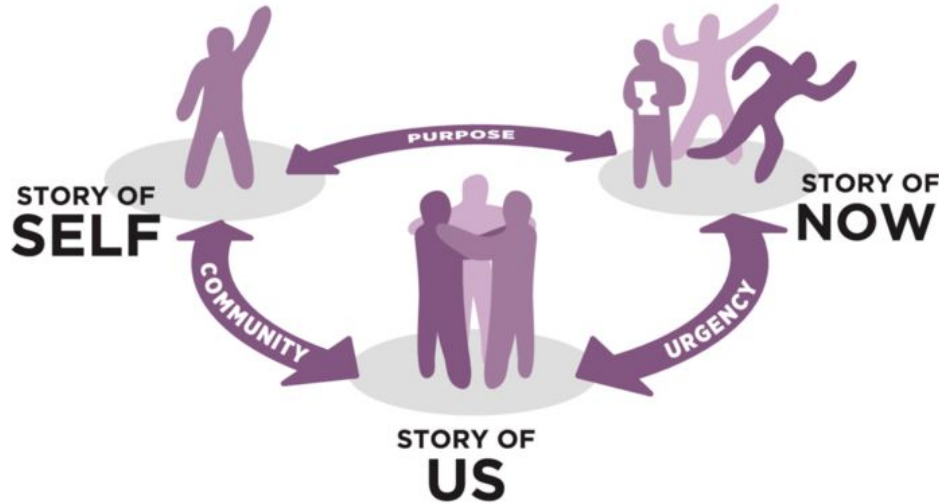
This month we looked at the ripple effects of small kindnesses and the impact they can have. We began the session with this poem.

I've been thinking about the way, when you walk
down a crowded aisle, people pull in their legs
to let you by. Or how strangers still say "bless you"
when someone sneezes, a leftover
from the Bubonic plague. "Don't die," we are saying.
And sometimes, when you spill lemons
from your grocery bag, someone else will help you
pick them up. Mostly, we don't want to harm each other.
We want to be handed our cup of coffee hot,
and to say thank you to the person handing it. To smile
at them and for them to smile back. For the waitress
to call us honey when she sets down the bowl of clam chowder,
and for the driver in the red pick-up truck to let us pass.
We have so little of each other, now. So far
from tribe and fire. Only these brief moments of exchange.
What if they are the true dwelling of the holy, these
fleeting temples we make together when we say, "Here,
have my seat," "Go ahead — you first," "I like your hat."

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/19/magazine/poem-small-kindnesses.html>

Importance of storytelling

Gabrielle told a story about starting a new job. She needed special accommodations made due to a medical condition. The chief exec made allowances for her and spent time talking to her about her condition. This left a lasting impact.



Today's session looked at the power of storytelling. Maureen and Gabrielle kicked us off with stories of small kindnesses that were shown to them in medical settings. From these stories, we discussed how small acts of kindness can lead to big culture shifts.

Maureen shared a story about a time her mother was in the hospital. The doctor made it a point to ask Maureen and her family about her mother in a human way, not just as a patient. Another doctor lengthened visiting hours and removed some barriers to visitation.

Listening with fascination



While storytelling holds immense power, so does listening.

Nancy Kline argues for the importance of listening *with fascination*. Too often, we listen solely to respond. Let's start listening *with fascination* to others and what they share.

Kindness in
healthcare

Breakout group discussion

We then moved into small breakout groups to practice telling purposeful stories and listening with fascination. Specifically, participants were asked to share at story about *a time they broke the rules as a patient/carer to improve their care and experience.*

A simple hand squeeze

A time that a shadowing student broke the rules and held a patient's hand while they were in surgery because they seemed to be in slight distress.

A good death means a good bereavement.

When Gill's mother fell ill, she knew that her mother didn't want to die in a hospital. The paramedics stayed with Gill for two hours suggesting equipment and tips, allowing the family to make the final decision. This was a lasting kindness.

Mutual compassion

A doctor who burst into tears while giving a child their diagnosis. The sharer noted the importance of vulnerability and humanity in such emotional moments.

Reflections from breakout rooms

Breaking a rule can feel just as scary as not breaking a rule. Gabrielle reflected on being told to do things as a doctor that she knew she wouldn't have wanted as a patient.

Take time to think about why you are in healthcare. *What culture shifts do you want to see?*



In each story, we hear that the patient received better care because someone slightly broke the rules - **sometimes rules need to be questioned** and can we be brave enough to do this?

We see that the healthcare system saved money *while also* being kind. **Kindness doesn't need to be expensive.**

Acknowledgements

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For all enquiries please contact us [via the Kindness in Healthcare website.](#)