

The Nature of Suffering and the Goals of Nursing

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Objectives

- **Describe the previous literature related to suffering**
- **Explore narratives of suffering**
- **Identify 10 tenets of the nature of suffering**

Those who scream in pain and suffer in silence

- **Mute Suffering**
- **Expressive Suffering**
- **New Identity**

William Reich

Spiritual – Scientific Practitioners

Rebirth of the Clinic

“Under this new medical covenant, a spiritual-scientific practitioner would affirm that the transcendent is made manifest at the edge of the surgeon’s knife, at the tips of the palpating fingers of the pediatrician, in the firm handshake of the internist, in the birth of the child whose unwed mother has AIDS, in the tears of the woman who feels a hard lump in her one remaining breast, and in the vacant stare of the elderly man with dementia.”

Rebirth of the Clinic (cont.)

“A spiritual-scientific practitioner would affirm that the transcendent is there when disease and suffering are recognized together, when the hand that performs the spinal tap distills compassion into the needle’s point, the objectivity of science with the subjectivity of God’s healing will; the particularity of the case at hand with the universality of a profession under oath; the finitude of the moment and the infinity of a life lived in the service of love. Thus might the clinic be reborn.”

(Sulmasy, 2006)

The Spiritual Crisis of Fatigue

“Fatigue wastes time and time is precious.”

BR Ferrell, M Grant, GE Dean, B Funk, J Ly

From “Bone Tired : The experience of fatigue and its impact on quality of life” 1996. Oncology Nursing Forum

Eric Cassell

“Suffering is experienced by persons, not merely by bodies and has its source in challenges that threaten the intactness of the person as a complex social and psychologic entity.”

(Cassell, 1982)

A Case of Dementia



“The Face of God”

The Role of Witness and Moral Agent

- **Firsthand Observation/Providing Voice**
- **Ceremonial Role/Ritual**
- **Expert Witness**
- **Visionary**

(Kahn and Steeves, 1996)

Cardiac Care: A Case of the Heart

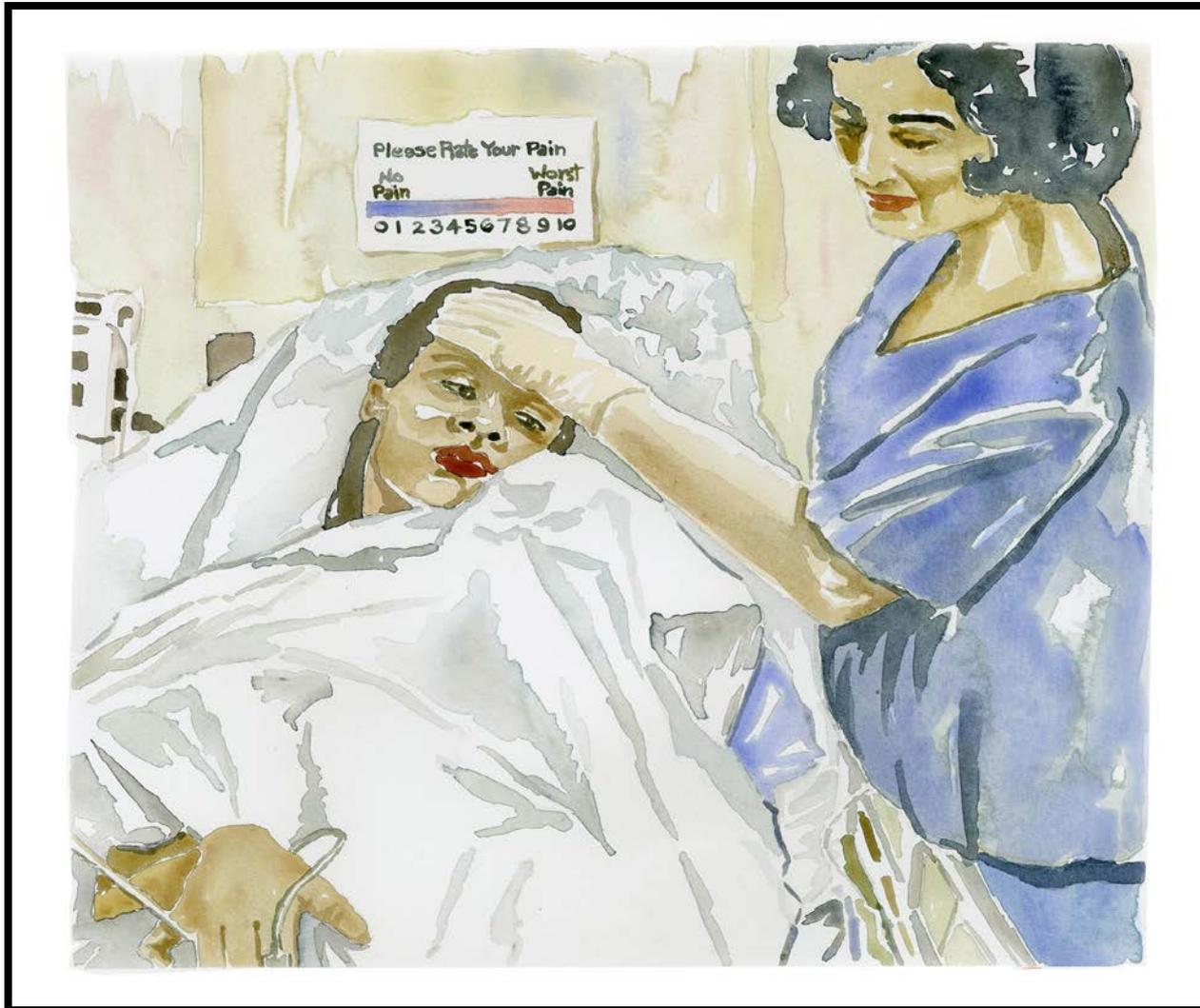
Forgiveness

Beyond “simple acts of pardoning, excusing, forgetting, or denying”

(Ashby, 2003)

Pulmonary Disease

The Prodigal Daughter



Renal Disease

A Sacred Bath

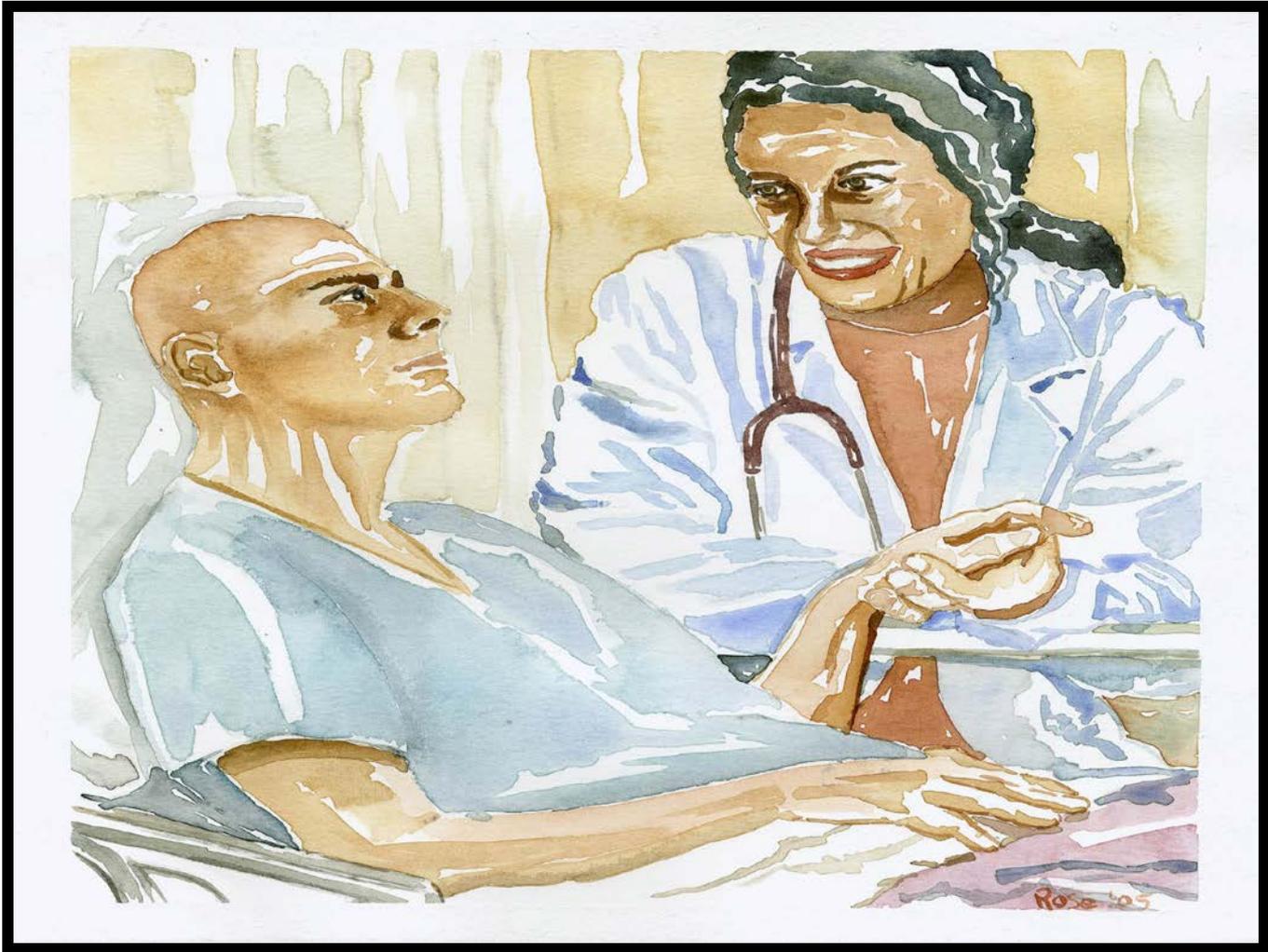


The Female Face of God at Auschwitz (Raphael)



Showing Up

“Sometimes we can only witness. We cannot fix or do the work of creating meaning. This family responds to support, to ideas, to reframing, but ultimately they have to wrestle with the guilt themselves. We can provide a container, a holding environment of safety so they don’t have to do this in isolation. We can keep showing up, even when it’s messy and ragged and uncomfortable.”



Come Sit With Me

Death is awful, demonic. If you think your task as comforter is to tell me that really, all things considered, it's not so bad, you do not sit with me in my grief but place yourself off in the distance away from me. Over there, you are of no help. What I need to hear from you is that you recognize how painful it is. I need to hear from you that you are with me in my desperation. To comfort me, you have to come close. Come sit beside me on my mourning bench.

(Wolterstorff, 1987)



**The Nature of Suffering
and the Goals of Nursing**
Ferrell & Coyle
(Oxford University Press, 2008)

The Nature of Suffering

- 1. Suffering is described as a loss of control which creates insecurity. Suffering people often feel helpless and trapped, unable to escape their circumstances.**

The Nature of Suffering

- 2. In most instances, suffering is associated with loss. The loss may be of a relationship or of some aspect of the self, or loss of some aspect of the physical body. The loss may be evident only in the mind of the sufferer, but it nonetheless leaves a person diminished and with a sense of brokenness.**



Breaking Bad News... Breaking a Heart

The Nature of Suffering

- 3. Suffering is an intensely personal experience.**

The Nature of Suffering

- 4. Suffering is accompanied by a range of intense emotions including sadness, anguish, fear, abandonment, despair, and a myriad of other emotions.**



The Nature of Suffering

- 5. Suffering can be deeply linked to a recognition of one's own mortality. When threatened by serious illness, people may fear the end of life. Conversely, for others, living with serious illness may result in a yearning for death.**

The Nature of Suffering

- 6. Suffering often involves asking the question “why?” Illness or loss may be seen as untimely and undeserved. Suffering people frequently seek to find meaning and answers for that which is unknowable.**



The Nature of Suffering

- 7. Suffering is often associated with separation from the world. Individuals may express intense loneliness and yearn for connection with others while also feeling intense distress about dependency on others.**

The Nature of Suffering

- 8. Suffering is often accompanied by spiritual distress. Regardless of religious affiliation, individuals experiencing illness may feel a sense of hopelessness. When life is threatened, there may be a self-evaluation of what has been lived and what remains undone. Becoming weak and vulnerable and facing mortality may cause one to reevaluate his/her relationship with a higher being.**

The Nature of Suffering

- 9. Suffering is not synonymous with pain but is closely associated with it. Physical pain is closely related to psychological, social, and spiritual distress. Pain which persists without meaning becomes suffering.**

The Nature of Suffering

- 10. Suffering occurs when an individual feels voiceless. This may occur when the person is mute to give words to their experience or when their “screams” are unheard.**

On Deeper Reflections

(G. Sachs)

