

Introduzione/Introduction

Phenomenological perspectives of self-care in healthcare professionals' continuing education

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ABSTRACT

Healthcare professionals, daily confronted with existential failty, feel themselves emotionally vulnerable too. For this reason, they need knowledge and tools in order to take care for themselves. Phenomenology provides an epistemological model that includes subjective and affective dimensions and legitimates lived experience as a source of cognition. In the undergraduate and continuing education of healthcare professionals, the phenomenological approach can represent a way of promoting self-care through personal narrative and reflection.

Keywords: *Healthcare - Phenomenology - Continuing education - Self-care*

I professionisti della salute, coinvolti in situazioni di fragilità esistenziale, si trovano a loro volta in condizioni di vulnerabilità emotiva. Essi, pertanto, hanno bisogno di acquisire saperi e strumenti per aver cura di sé. La fenomenologia rappresenta un paradigma epistemologico capace di includere le dimensioni soggettive ed affettive e di valorizzare l'esperienza vissuta come fonte di conoscenza. Nella formazione di base e continua dei professionisti della cura, l'approccio fenomenologico può fornire un'indicazione di metodo per sostenere la cura di sé attraverso la narrazione e la riflessività.

Parole chiave: *Lavoro di cura - Fenomenologia - Formazione continua - Cura di sé*

In the past years, healthcare professionals' undergraduate and continuing education (involving physicians, nurses, rehabilitation therapists, educators, social workers etc.) has shown an increasing interest in epistemological paradigms, educational models and didactic strategies aimed at building/improving cognitive, technical and communicative competencies.

The caring work, in the different contexts and existential situations in which is carried out, is intrinsically characterized by ethical and humanistic features, other than scientific and technical, and it is interlaced with intense emotions, which can make healthcare professionals perceive themselves as “lacking” special knowledge and skills. In this sense, recent developments in the field of narrative medicine and medical humanities tend to bridge the gap that has been experienced for a long time in educating people who will care for others. In particular, the new approaches to healthcare professionals' training seek to legitimate those subjective, emotional and ethical dimensions on which not only the quality of the therapeutic relationship depends, but also the tension towards a deeper humanization of healthcare services and contexts.

To avoid the use of too impersonal and detached communicative styles (that imply a loss of motivation and meaning in the caring work), or, conversely, to prevent excessively engaging relationships (that imply the risk of exhausting a professionals' personal resources and therefore burnout), healthcare professionals need to learn by knowing themselves (besides the knowledge and the skills required in the clinical practice), in order to manage the complexity and the potential difficulties of the caring relationships. To achieve this aim, continuously reflecting on one's own practice and thoughts, sharing emotions and feelings – avoiding their repression –, searching for new motivation after failure and disappointment, and taking care of others' and one's own fragilities may be very useful. According to the archetype of the “wounded healer”, it's the practice of caring for the self that allows a professional to care for the others, in a balanced and authentic manner.

From this perspective, the Phenomenological-existential approach can be considered a privileged frame, within which cultivating a thoughtful and sensitive practice, that is not undermined by claims of objectification and neutrality, all aspects that, in the healthcare field, are placed on top of “professionalism”. That frame allows the professional to combine, in his/her clinical experience, the need of a rigorous practice with the “human factor”, which constitutes the most unpredictable and, at the same time, necessary component of the caring process.

This special issue recollects experiences and reflections of a phenomenologically oriented group of investigation that shared a common work in the continuing education of healthcare professionals in contexts (oncology, palliative care, end-of-life accompaniment) where the need for self-care is strongly perceived.

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