

The Gift of Kindness

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“Kindness—the quality of being friendly, generous, and considerate.” —Oxford English Dictionary

DR HOOPER AND I WERE alerted recently of an ASPAN member’s Kindness Board, inspired by the #makekindnessLOUD¹ movement. She had included five *JoPAN* articles that she believed made a perfect blend for the Kindness Board. Kate Edwards, BSN, RN, CPAN, who works in the postanesthesia care unit (PACU) at Novant Health UVA/Haymarket Medical Center in Haymarket, VA, sent an e-mail with a picture of the board (Figure 1). The Kindness Board has copies of the five articles that were inspiring to her unit, as well as flyers with simple acts of kindness to remind us that kindness is a choice. The phrase “We believe in human kindness,” which is on the flyers, comes directly from the Magnolia Manifesto that says “We believe in human kindness, knowing we are made better when we work together.”¹

The idea of a Kindness Board has really made me stop and evaluate how I process interactions on a daily basis. Kindness is easy when others are kind, but what about those interactions when others are not kind? Do I assume the worst? Or do I think that perhaps this person is having a bad day—maybe her car broke down on the way to work or he is in the midst of marital difficulty, or a patient just screamed at her.

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What is kindness? Kindness is a response of consideration and actions that are unselfish, or an attitude that places compassion for others before oneself.² Sometimes kindness is nothing more than a smile and “have a nice day” to the clerk at the grocery store or paying for the meal of the person behind you in line at Starbucks. Sometimes it is allowing someone to cut in line in front of you in traffic, taking a meal to someone who has been ill, or offering to start an intravenous (IV) line for another nurse.

Over a decade ago, researchers looked at happiness in relation to kindness. Otake et al³ found that there is a relationship between kindness and happiness. They found that kind people experience more happiness, have happier memories, and more positive relationships.³ More recently, Rowland and Curry⁴ found that performing kind activities for seven days increased happiness and they reported a positive correlation between the number of kind acts and the increase in happiness. Compassion and kindness can reduce stress, enhance our immune systems, and help reduce negative emotions such as anger, anxiety, and depression.^{2,5}

Brewster and Waxman⁶ authored a reflection that discussed adding kindness to the conversation at patient handover. The reflection is geared towards physicians and junior physicians, but the information is easily translated to nurses. To enforce collegiality and mutual respect, they changed the ISBAR (Introduction, Situation, Background, Assessment and Recommendation) process that is typically used for handover to K (Kindness)-ISBAR. The K-ISBAR attempts to change a sometimes-negative culture. Brewster and Waxman describe acts of kindness as simple as a thank you, or a smile, or other acts of thoughtfulness.⁶ What a wonderful idea!

The five articles from *JoPAN* that Kate and her team added to the Kindness Board had a common theme of kindness at work. Iacono⁷ discussed a

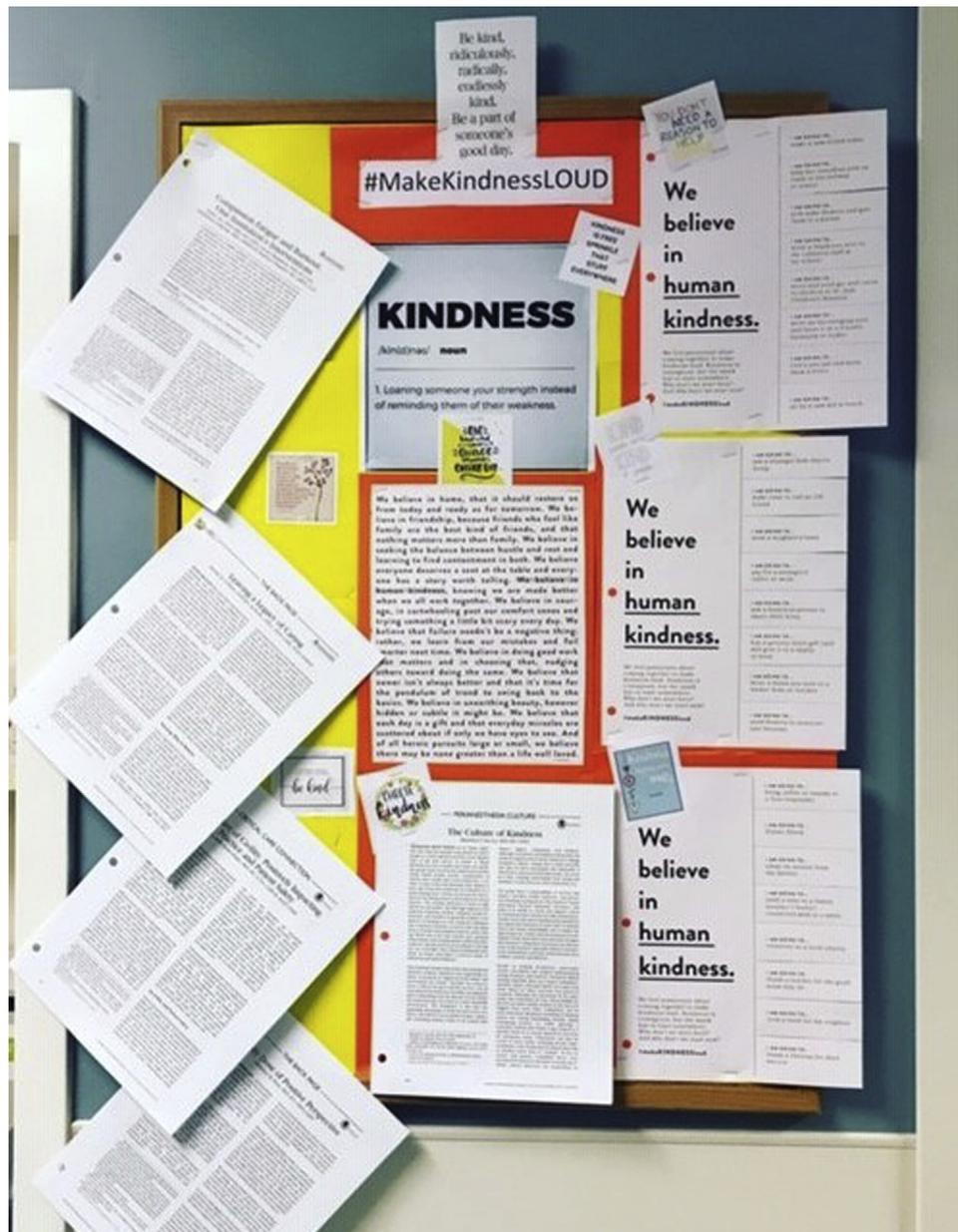


Figure 1. Novant Health UVA/Haymarket Medical Center postanesthesia care unit Kindness Board. This figure is available in color online at www.jopan.org.

kindness culture in the work unit that included respect for coworkers. She discussed how often we take the time to show kindness to our patients, but not always to our colleagues. When that happens, patient safety and personal relationships suffer. The best nurses make every effort to treat each other with respect, dignity, collegiality, and kindness, resulting in a culture of collaborative kindness that is “supported, attainable, valued, and sustainable”.⁷

Makic⁸ discussed kindness in terms of civility at work to maintain a healthy work environment. Civility facilitates communication and teamwork with the result that patient safety occurs. Incivility or unkindness in the workplace can lead to decreased morale, increased absenteeism, higher nurse turnover, and a detrimental effect on patient safety.^{8,9} Makic also discusses a strategy that can be used by the nurse to address concerning behaviors, CUS (an acronym for “concerned,

uncomfortable, safety”). Nurses can state the concern in an objective manner and place the focus of the issue on safety of the patient.⁸

Price¹⁰ considered the effect of a positive perspective in the work environment. The acts that she described as small but meaningful exercises to increase a positive perspective at work are indeed kindnesses. Some of the examples she gave included encouraging each other, offering deserved praise in front of others, and keeping company with those who have the same mindset, similar commitment, and passion.¹⁰ O’Brien¹¹ talks of leaving a legacy of caring. She asks the question “What will you leave, and what will you be remembered for, in your legacy?” when you leave your nursing position. Personally, I would like to be remembered as competent, as most of us would, but most importantly that I showed kindness, respect, and inclusion to patients, their families, and to my colleagues.

Lee et al¹² discussed compassion fatigue and burnout and what one institution did to intervene.

The authors examine compassion fatigue in terms of the nurse who is too tired to care and who forgoes compassion to prevent hopelessness and dejection. Some of the signs of compassion fatigue are high rates of absenteeism, dysfunctional teamwork, and aggressive behaviors among staff.¹² One of the important points of this article was the need for self-care. When we are healthy and take care of ourselves, we are most able to reach out to others with compassion and kindness. Whether it is through friendships, family, employee assistance programs, private counseling, or other strategies, it is most important that we maintain self-care.¹²

With Christmas around the corner, think about the gift of kindness...giving more than receiving. What can we do to show kindness to others—our neighbors, our coworkers, strangers, and others we see on a regular basis. Try a 21-day challenge where you attempt a specific kindness each day for 21 days in a row; or pick a day of the week and carry out three acts of kindness on that day each week.¹⁰ What a gift that would be!

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