



## BOSTON COLLEGE

WILLIAM F. CONNELL SCHOOL OF NURSING

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To Faculty and Fellow Students at the Connell School of Nursing,

With thanks to the Susan Flynn Oncology Nursing Development Program, I recently had the opportunity to attend a conference titled *Spirituality & Patient Care: Hope & Healing* at Massachusetts General Hospital. As a summer 2018 Carol A. Ghiloni Fellow, and a senior nursing student, considering the importance of providing holistic care to patients and their families has become enormously valuable in my preparation as a future nurse. This specific educational opportunity offered a variety of presentations from nurses, chaplains, social workers and professional educators perspectives on how elements beyond medical interventions influence the experiences patients have in the hospital. I left this conference with a stronger understanding of the unique position nurses are in to recognize and respect the role spirituality and hope can play in a patient's comprehensive well being.

In an especially moving element of the conference, two presenters engaged in a series of role-playing exercises to display challenging conversations nurses or other care team members may encounter with when interacting with persons facing difficult diagnoses, challenging treatments, or heavy decisions about personal values in end of life care. The interactions these discussions highlighted that the specifics of what is said in intense moments such as these is not the essential element in a caretaker providing valuable comfort. In each conversation what mattered was the value care providers showed for the highly individual and personal experiences the patient has in times of fear and illness. By considering a variety of communication styles, all of which were linked in their openness, freedom from judgement, and statements of genuine support, I felt even as an inexperienced nurse I could utilise the approaches that felt most natural to me and reflect a similar role of meaningful service to the persons I am caring for now and in the future.

The conference also placed emphasis on the importance of considering the caregiver experience when a loved one is faced with illness or suffering. A series of case studies on true provider experiences was offered, each of which touched on how generational, cultural and personal beliefs and perspectives can influence hospital encounters. The concept that these

experienced care providers, who hailed from a variety of professional fields, are continuously confronted with new and complex family and caregiver needs allowed me to recognize the ceaseless responsibility care providers, including nurses, have to remain willing to learn from each of the persons who seek their care. I aspire to someday work with a team who shows patients, families and caregivers openness and deep respect towards matters to them.

Most important to my experience at this conference was the realization that spirituality and hope have already had significant connections to my experiences with patients and their loved ones. The vignettes, case example, and element of guidance offered by the conference's admirable presenters brought back memories of specific patients that I have had the chance to meet and interact with as a student and a fellow. In my reflections, I could identify areas in which nurses and providers I worked with displayed excellence in their care for the whole person, as well as elements of interaction that could be improved with respect to the new perspective this conference material offered. As I progress closer in my role as a student towards becoming an independent nurse, I recognize that challenging times, hard questions, and painful conversations are pervasive across care environments. I am deeply grateful for this experience, and I challenge my community at CSON and beyond to continue to consider the ways in which we can integrate a broad comprehension of spirituality, hope and healing in our work everyday. Though no one person can perfectly satisfy these needs for a patient, with a willingness to learn from others, seek improvement, and open oneself to the needs of others, individuals like ourselves have the privilege of doing our best for the persons we care for. For more information about the Susan Flynn Oncology Nursing Development Program and the Carol A. Ghiloni Summer Fellowship, please do not hesitate to contact me at [mignosak@bc.edu](mailto:mignosak@bc.edu).

Sincerely,

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