



The International Charter for Human Values in Healthcare: An interprofessional global collaboration to enhance values and communication in healthcare



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ABSTRACT

Objectives: The human dimensions of healthcare—core values and skilled communication necessary for every healthcare interaction—are fundamental to compassionate, ethical, and safe relationship-centered care. The objectives of this paper are to: describe the development of the *International Charter for Human Values in Healthcare* which delineates core values, articulate the role of skilled communication in enacting these values, and provide examples showing translation of the Charter's values into action.

Methods: We describe development of the Charter using combined qualitative research methods and the international, interprofessional collaboration of institutions and individuals worldwide.

Results: We identified five fundamental categories of human values for every healthcare interaction—Compassion, Respect for Persons, Commitment to Integrity and Ethical Practice, Commitment to Excellence, and Justice in Healthcare—and delineated subvalues within each category. We have disseminated the Charter internationally and incorporated it into education/training. Diverse healthcare partners have joined in this work.

Conclusion: We chronicle the development and dissemination of the *International Charter for Human Values in Healthcare*, the role of skilled communication in demonstrating values, and provide examples of educational and clinical programs integrating these values.

Practice implications: The Charter identifies and promotes core values clinicians and educators can demonstrate through skilled communication and use to advance humanistic educational programs and practice.

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1. Introduction

The human dimensions of healthcare—the core values and communication skills that should be present in every healthcare interaction—are fundamental to the practice of compassionate, ethical, and safe relationship-centered care. Well-developed values

and effective communication are essential in all healthcare settings and in all aspects of healthcare, from prevention and health maintenance to illness diagnosis, treatment, and recovery [1–10]. Accrediting organizations internationally require teaching and assessment of both humanistic skills and communication skills [7]. Studies show that effective communication, grounded by core values, improves health outcomes, quality of care, and patient and clinician satisfaction [11–15]. However, these human dimensions of care have not yet received the emphasis necessary to make them central to every healthcare encounter.

The *International Charter for Human Values in Healthcare* [16] is the result of a rigorous, three-year process of international collaborations to identify and develop a framework for values relevant across cultures and languages. The objectives of this paper are to: (a) describe the conceptualization, development, and dissemination of the *International Charter for Human Values in Healthcare* which arose out of an international, interprofessional collaboration to identify core values that should be present in every healthcare interaction, (b) systematically describe how these values can be realized through skilled communication, and (c) show the translation of the *International Charter's* values into action by providing examples of a faculty education program and a research-based intervention that embed human values in healthcare interactions. Our overarching aim is to develop ways to better cultivate and enhance the human dimensions of care in all healthcare relationships including clinician–patient, interprofessional/team, colleague–colleague, and others within and between healthcare systems and stakeholders.

2. Methods

2.1. Development of an international collaboration for communication in healthcare

In 2010, two of the authors (DS, ER) decided to bring together healthcare communication experts and leaders to explore the critical role of communication and relationships in healthcare across different cultures and settings around the world. In March 2011, the First International Symposium and Roundtable on Healthcare Communication was convened at Hong Kong Polytechnic University. The Roundtable brought together 30 invited experts from medicine, nursing and other health professions, medical/healthcare education, interprofessional training and practice, health policy and leadership, health sciences, linguistics, health communication, and sociology. This group formed the International Collaborative for Communication in Healthcare, created intentionally with an international and interprofessional perspective considered essential to the effort. The goal was to develop a multidisciplinary, international collaborative of experts working together to bridge the gaps between healthcare research, education and practice in order to better understand and enhance communication and relationships in healthcare systems worldwide. Focusing initially on Asia and the Pacific Rim, we quickly expanded to a more global perspective.

In June 2013, the international collaborative was formally launched as the International Research Centre for Communication in Healthcare (IRCCH) [17,18], co-sponsored by Hong Kong Polytechnic University and the University of Technology Sydney, Australia. Curtin University, Western Australia, became a strategic partner in July 2013. IRCCH currently has 80 members from 15 countries.

What makes IRCCH particularly distinctive is that, first, it brings together highly regarded healthcare professionals and academics with linguists and communication experts; second, it is committed to translational research that focuses on applying the findings to practice and educational development; and third, the *International*

Charter for Human Values in Healthcare is used as a foundational document to inform and focus IRCCH's research, education, and practice initiatives.

2.2. Development and refinement of the International Charter for Human Values in Healthcare

During our work together at the First International Symposium and Roundtable on Healthcare Communication in March 2011, we recognized that the nature and quality of communication in healthcare was fundamentally influenced by the values of healthcare professionals, clinicians, educators, administrators, organizations, and institutions—i.e. the values of essentially all healthcare players and stakeholders. Representing diverse cultural backgrounds, languages, and perspectives, we quickly learned that clinicians, patients, caregivers, and healthcare communities across the world share many human values. We decided to identify these common core values.

An international, interprofessional working group of Roundtable participants met to explore the human dimensions of care in healthcare relationships, to identify important values for healthcare interactions, and to begin the development of an international healthcare charter addressing core values that would provide an explicit underlying foundation for healthcare relationships.

Using qualitative research methods, iterative content analyses, focus groups, Delphi methodology, and expert consensus, we created and refined the *International Charter for Human Values in Healthcare*. We used an expert focus group model to develop our questions for study and to identify an initial list of values, followed by identification of additional values, and review and consensus by the full Roundtable group of 30 participants. The expert focus group expanded into the ongoing Human Dimensions of Care Working Group (14 international, multidisciplinary members) of the International Collaborative for Communication in Healthcare (the precursor to IRCCH).

Using expert iterative consensus, a subgroup of the working group (ER, WB, and MH), as well as a second subgroup of applied linguists in healthcare communication (DS, JKHP, and others), identified fundamental categories of values and classified sub-values within each category. Further review and consensus by the larger group followed. In mid-2011, the resulting document became the first version of the *International Charter for Human Values in Healthcare*.

The *International Charter* was further refined using additional qualitative data from a number of interprofessional groups internationally. Two questions, identified and refined by group consensus earlier, were used:

1. Drawing on your professional experiences and your experiences as a patient, what are the core human values that should be present in every healthcare interaction?
2. From your list above, what are the top 4 values you think should be present in every healthcare interaction?

Healthcare professionals and medical educators as well as patients and caregivers attending major interprofessional healthcare conferences identified, prioritized, and discussed core values for healthcare interactions. Their responses were used, via iterative consensus of a subgroup of the Human Dimensions of Care Working Group, to further refine the *International Charter*. The conferences included: National Academies of Practice (NAP) Annual Forum and Meeting, March 2011; International Conference on Communication in Healthcare (ICCH) November 2011; Interprofessional Patient-Centered Care Conference, "Patient-Centered Care: Working Together in an Interprofessional World", September 2012; and the American Academy on Communication in Healthcare Research

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