

Commentary

Humanity in a World Without Empathy: Medical Professionals and a Holistic View of the Human Being

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The article discusses the necessity of restoring empathy and a holistic approach in medicine, using the example of Hanna Chrzanowska. It highlights her commitment to treating the patient as a whole, addressing their physical, spiritual, and social needs. The paper examines the challenges posed by secularization and growing cultural diversity, which hinder modern medical professionals from adapting to the transcultural needs of patients. The author suggests that a return to humanistic values and narrative medicine could help restore humanity in healthcare.

Introduction

In a world where empathy seems to be vanishing, the question of the essence of humanity takes on particular significance. Medical attitudes, once oriented toward the entirety of human existence, increasingly focus on mechanistic treatment of disease, neglecting the person as a subject. This article reflects on the need to return to a holistic view of the patient, considering the transcultural and spiritual needs of the modern world. The inspiration for this discussion stems from the work of Hanna Chrzanowska, an outstanding figure in Polish nursing, whose life and work serve as a beacon in times of medical dehumanization.

Discussion

Hanna Chrzanowska (1902–1973), a nurse, educator, and author of numerous initiatives for the care of the sick, exemplifies a person who combined professionalism with profound care for the whole human being. Chrzanowska viewed patients as complex entities—physical, spiritual, and social. At a time when the majority of Polish society identified as religious, her actions were deeply rooted in

Christian values of neighborly love and respect for human dignity. At the same time, she refrained from imposing her faith or beliefs, leaving space for the patient's freedom of choice. A key aspect of her approach was the ability to empathetically listen to the needs of others. For Chrzanowska, illness was not merely a dysfunction of the body but an event that affected the patient's entire life—family, work, social relationships, and spirituality. Such a holistic approach remains relevant but faces unique challenges in today's secularized world.

Modern society is not only dominated by secularizing tendencies but also by increasing cultural diversity. Secularization brings difficulties in understanding and accepting the spiritual dimension of human life, often leading to its marginalization in medical care. Meanwhile, patients, regardless of their beliefs, remain spiritual beings in need of support during existential crises brought on by illness. This issue is further complicated by transculturality. Contemporary societies are a conglomerate of different traditions, religions, and value systems. Medical professionals face the challenge of recognizing and understanding the needs of patients who often hold beliefs entirely different from their own. A lack of empathy can lead to serious communication and care errors and, ultimately, to the dehumanization of the healing process.

In the face of these challenges, restoring a holistic approach to patients is essential. Such a model of care requires medical professionals to look beyond the individual health issue and see the broader context of the patient's life. The actions of Chrzanowska, as well as contemporary concepts of narrative medicine—which emphasizes understanding the patient's story as a path to holistic care—can serve as inspiration.

It is important to note that a holistic perspective does not mean abandoning a scientific approach to treatment. On the contrary, it requires combining medical knowledge with interpersonal skills, cultural competence, and openness to the spiritual dimension of human life. Developing educational programs for medical staff that include these aspects is equally crucial.

Despite the passage of time since Hanna Chrzanowska's work, she remains a model of humanity in medical practice, reminding us of the necessity of seeing patients as whole beings. In a world where empathy has disappeared, her approach continues to be profoundly relevant. Faced with secularization and transculturality, modern medicine must renew its mission, which should be both scientific and humanistic. Restoring a holistic view of the human being could become a step toward rebuilding empathy and humanity in medicine.

Conclusions

Restoring empathy and a holistic approach in medicine requires conscious effort from medical professionals and the healthcare system. Models such as Hanna Chrzanowska's demonstrate that it is possible to combine professionalism with deep respect for the patient as a multidimensional being. In the face of challenges posed by secularization and transculturality, medicine should strive to develop cultural competence and spiritual support for patients. A return to humanistic values could become the key to restoring empathy and humanity in healthcare, leading to better treatment outcomes and greater public trust.

Learn More About Hanna Chrzanowska

- <https://hannachrzanowska.pl/zyciorys/>

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