Commentary: A 'history of problematizations' for dementia education: a Foucauldian approach to understanding the framing of dementia

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Abstract
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Commentary by Victoria Traynor

These authors make a unique contribution to dementia care by explaining to nurse educators how a Foucauldian analysis of how dementia is conceptualised can inform future dementia care curricula and, thus, how undergraduate nurses learn about the meaning of living with a dementia. Nurse educators have the opportunity to influence future dementia care practitioners and redress the powerlessness of some individuals living with a dementia who experience care being delivered to them, rather than being partners in care, and the fatalistic rhetoric of a diagnosis of dementia. The authors provide nurse educators with the impetus to amend their dementia care curricula to focus on the meaning of living with a dementia rather than the pathophysiology or medicalisation of dementia.

The authors focused on the role of undergraduate nurse educators but the message is also relevant to educators of post-registration nurses and undergraduate learners and registered practitioners within the medical and allied health disciplines. The Foucauldian interpretation provided an analysis of the way in which dementia is conceptualised for individuals living with a dementia across different professional domains. A future paper could enhance this discussion by extending the interpretation to understanding the meaning of being a family carer or a family member of an individual living with a dementia.

The paper motivated me to consider how I would evaluate a Foucauldian informed dementia care curriculum. As nurse educators, we can easily create opportunities to demonstrate the effects of an innovative curriculum on the understanding of learners. We can generate evidence about our innovation and be confident in encouraging other educators to adopt our new approaches, in this case, Foucauldian informed curricula. The authors demonstrated how adopting this innovative approach to dementia care curricula has the potential to enable nurse educators, and the learners of their education, to become advocates for individuals living with a dementia and their family carers in the same way that midwives, mental health practitioners and disability workers are doing for clients and family carers in their everyday work.

The authors of this paper explained how alternative discourses about dementia influence our perceptions of what it means to be living with a dementia and thus how dementia care is delivered. They provided a clear alternative for an innovative approach to dementia care curricula using a Foucauldian inspired understanding about the competing interpretations about the meaning of living with a dementia. They suggested we acknowledge these differences and choose the ones which will contribute to the empowerment of individuals living with a dementia and their family carers rather than ones that are disabling. I look forward to reading future papers by the authors to learn how they integrate Foucauldian interpretations into dementia care curriculum. We can all make a contribution by taking their lead and amending our dementia care learning activities to enable learners to authentically understand what it means to live with a dementia and, thus, deliver healthcare services that will positively support individuals living with a dementia and their family carers to live the best lives they can.