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Professional empathy improves the patient experience and health outcomes while reducing costs: Evidence-based solutions

The decline in empathy in healthcare has reached global proportions and highlights the need for evidence-based interventions. 90% of nurses, physicians and hospital administrators endorsed the need for institutional empathy training in a recent Schwartz Center Survey. Professional empathy is correlated with patient safety, patient satisfaction, better health outcomes, and clinician wellbeing. Research shows that empathy for patients, declines throughout medical training with increasing burnout in medical professionals. Implicating up to 60% of nurses in the US, patients are demanding humanistic care which is paramount to restoring the public's trust in the medical profession. This presentation will highlight novel empathy research that demonstrates that empathy can be taught with sustainable behavior changes and our recent meta-analysis that demonstrated that relationship factors improved health outcomes such as obesity, asthma, diabetes, hypertension, and pulmonary infections. These interventions are closely tied to cost reduction. A multi-centered randomized controlled trial was conducted at a large general hospital to determine whether novel neuroscience-based empathy training could improve clinician empathy at the level of patient perception. The training group showed significant improvement in patient ratings of empathy (p=0.02). A brief series of 3 training sessions significantly improved clinicians' empathic and relational skills as rated by their patients. The training has been translated into a web-based format for global accessibility. With patients deserving humanistic care from their healthcare institutions, we present a solution that offers a step towards systemic changes to improving compassionate care.

Biography

Helen Riess, MD, is working as an Associate Professor of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School. She directs the Empathy and Relational Science Program at Massachusetts General Hospital. Her research team conducts translational research utilizing the neuroscience of emotions. The effectiveness of her empathy education approach has been demonstrated in a randomized controlled trial. She has published extensively in peer-reviewed journals and is an internationally recognized speaker and researcher. Her Empathy TEDx talk has been viewed by over 100,000 viewers. Her empathy training curricula are implemented internationally in healthcare. She is the Chief Scientific Officer of Empathetics, Inc., providing web-based empathy training solutions.

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