

## What Does it Mean to Have Compassion?

Maria Maniatis

Compassion is holding a patient's hand while they endure a breast biopsy, unknowingly entering a time where this mass could come back as cancer. Compassion is slowing down in the hallway when you are walking your crutched patient back to the waiting room. Compassion is bonding with the elderly couple that haven't seen or spoken to their granddaughter in years. Compassion is having an infant hold a finger as you gently scan his tiny head for a bleed. These are just a number of the countless examples involving the deeper meaning of compassion: *empathy*.

Working in healthcare, the job isn't one that can be described on a slab of paper, rather it is something that is evolving every day, and no day is the same as the last. A healthcare worker finds the compelling instinct within themselves to truly feel what their patient is going through, and undeniably find every way to reduce that suffering. As an ultrasound technician, our job is to be the detective if you will, it is to investigate the areas of concern and make arguments based on our findings to present to the radiologist. But that description, doesn't do our job justice. We find a mass, multiple masses, a clotted vein, an artery with no pulse, a ruptured aorta, or a fetus with no heartbeat, and we must remain silent, it isn't our job to disclose this information to the patient; that is up to the doctor. The doctor comes in, tells the patient in little words, "we found a malignant mass in your breast and we must biopsy it to see what it is, and how far along you are in your condition" he *leaves*. Now, this patient in distress is in your hands, and you have the option to leave, or to simply just sit with her, you sit there and you rub her back and hold her hand while tears are streaming down her face. You tell her that she's "strong" and "resilient." You offer her tissues and tell her she can, "get through anything." She leaves, and you're left with the heaviest feeling in your heart, like something just got ripped out of your chest- but the *bad* news wasn't even given to you. None of this was in that job description above, you didn't necessarily "sign up" for this now did you? Yes, you did.

A key component of healthcare, is how well you are able to feel and articulate to your patient that they are not *alone*, you are there for them when the going gets rough, all the way until the end, whatever the end may be. Compassion is not always a given, but one thing that is important to remember is: you don't know what is going on behind closed doors, you don't know everyone's story- judgments are made so quickly, but how you interact with others may not only define who you are, but how you make them feel.