

Reference:

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Self-care tools for creating resistance to burnout: A case study in Philophonetics Counselling

The language of experience awareness encompasses gesture, visualisation, human sounds and sensing. It enables undigested and disempowering experiences to be identified and processed to promote self-care and resistance to burnout.

A theoretical introduction to Philophonetics Counselling was printed in our previous issue.

The more intense, demanding and complicated the pressures of today's working environments are, the more effective the tools need to be with which to monitor, access and protect our inner system. The range of non-verbal modes of awareness and of expression exemplified by philophonetics counselling, can become a significant contribution for the empowerment, maintenance and self care of nurses. The following case study of a philophonetics counselling session with Mary illustrates the application of this process.

Mary had nursed for 30 years and was proud of her profession although she felt it was not regarded highly in the general community. Mary had rated herself as an excellent nurse in the past but for the past three

years was experiencing what she described as burnout. She felt emotionally exhausted, 'tired of caring, caring, caring' and had to struggle to be available for clients. Physically she was suffering from recurrent bouts of ill health and had developed chronic back pain that was aggravated by the heavy physical work on the wards. Mary expressed considerable feelings of disempowerment at her work, and was finding it difficult to get motivated to go to work each day. Her job performance was 'going backward'. She wanted to resign but needed the money. Her job satisfaction was very low and she felt unable to cope with the increasing demands placed upon her by what she perceived as an uncaring administration.

In relating her experiences, Mary wept openly, as she claimed that she was not valued

by the hospital system. This was Mary's first session, so she was asked to identify the most important single aspect she would like to address. She was very clear that it was urgent to address her chronic feelings of devaluation by the hospital administration and particularly the Nurse Administrator. Her wish was to '... have inner strength not to take on this negative perception that devalues me but to hold on to my perceptions of my own self-worth'.

What followed was the application of philophonetics tools of experience namely, gesturing, sensing and visualising. It began with a sequence which enables the client to gain an inside picture on the experience, termed the 'enter-exit behold sequence'. She was asked to recall a



moment of feeling devalued, to find where in her body that it felt strongest and to gesture it. It was her heart that she touched. She clutched one hand entwined in the other in a suffocating gesture. She was then asked to breathe into the gesture and feel it with her whole body. She was then directed to enter into her heart and gesture the feeling of her heart with her whole body. Mary was then asked to exit it, and through visualising images of experience arising within her, behold what was happening to her. She said she was hiding, and she felt small and diminished. She was trying to disappear. Mary was then directed to re-enter the position of her crushed heart and gain a picture of the force that was doing it to her. She then stepped out of the position and reported that it was a squashing energy, flattening the life out of her. Mary described this force as '... a heavy grey monster sucking out her life'.

At this point, an empowerment sequence was entered into for the purpose of unblocking the invasive force stuck inside of the individual, and to develop immunity to it so it cannot invade one's inner space in the future. The counsellor invited Mary to do the gesture of the force to a cushion, that represented her heart in the encounter. A sound '... gggg' was identified by Mary, that represented the power of the force doing it to her. The sound identified is compatible with the gesture of

the force of the monster. She entered back into the position of the victim with the crushed heart being suffocated by the force. The counsellor imitated the sound and Mary endured it until she could push it away with a 'g'. This was repeated until the 'g' and pushing away gesture was clear and direct and she could clearly stand against the force. This meant she could stand and confront it by looking at it directly while pushing it away without cowering or

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looking away. This empowerment sequence saw her being able to retain her boundaries in spite of the force.

This was followed by an exquisitely moving nurturing sequence in which the counsellor inspired Mary to draw on her inner resources that gave her strength to resist the force. She invoked the archetypal being of nursing with which she identified and which she described as '... the great carer and nurturer'. She moved and gestured herself being encompassed by this powerful being. Through visualisation and gesture she was able to

maintain her newly restored inner strength. At the conclusion of the session, her body language had changed from collapsed and dispirited to upright and enlivened. Her breathing had changed from shallow to deep. She took from the session powerful tools of empowering herself enabling her to maintain her resistance against the force that had been sucking the life out of her in the workplace. Mary was further able to protect and resource herself by invoking the being that nurtured her inner strength.

When Mary was interviewed a month later, she said her professional life was now very different as a result of her counselling session. She no longer felt devalued, as she had been able to retain her own image of her self-worth against the hospital administration's negative statements. The Nurse Administrator who she had experienced as overpowering and crippling her sense of self worth was still there, but Mary no longer felt invaded by her negativity. She said that her belief in her own self-worth was now so strong, that the Nurse Administrator's impact on her had diminished. She believed her job performance had improved and that her exhaustion had lessened considerably. Mary had decided to take a long holiday overseas to nurture herself and was positively contemplating returning to nursing with her new-found strength and enjoyment of her job.