Patient Identity Symbolized

Discovering the “Who” of the Patient as the Patient desires to be known and applying it in our ministry

“Could a greater miracle take place than for us to look through each other’s eyes for an instant?”

Henry David Thoreau

Considerations

• What would we see if we could see the patient as she wishes to be known?
• Would it make a difference in ministering to her?
• How do we “symbolize” who we are?
• Why does it matter?

Identity

Finding the “who,” the essence, of the patient and ministering to that patient
“To already know closes the door of further learning, but to recognize that we do not know, this can be the beginning of real journey.”

Kayla McClurg, Inward/Outward, Church of the Saviour, Washington, DC (January, 2014)

Providence Health & Services
Vision Statement
“Together as people of Providence, we answer the call of every person we serve:

Know me, care for me, ease my way.”

Patient Profile:
- Widowed mother of four adult children, Exec Asst to CEO of ABC Company, Volunteer at this hospital, tennis coach for teenagers . . . (Data telling us what the patient is)
- Pain in abdomen, Hx of Uterine CA, GERD, Glaucoma, allergic to ASA . . . (Data telling the reader how the patient is)

Implications of data gathered:
- Includes bias of the gatherer
- Filtered through lens of the gatherer
- Then, who is the patient that is experienced?
- Does the data reflect the individual as he or she would want to be known?
- How much of the person is lost?
Patient Profile:
• Determined, resourceful, and curious . . . (Characteristics of who the patient is)

To Consider:
• Have these characteristics already impacted the course of this woman’s healthcare?
• If these characteristics were known, would they change the care provided by the Chaplain?

“Who,” Our Identity, Begins with a Name

“God revealed himself to his people Israel by making his name known to them. A name expresses a person’s essence and identity and the meaning of this person’s life. God has a name; he is not an anonymous force. To disclose one’s name is to make oneself known to others; in a way it is to hand oneself over by becoming accessible, capable of being known more intimately and addressed personally.”

(Gatechism of the Catholic Church, para 203, 55)
• Throughout Scripture names have significance; where names are not given also has significance.
  – Jesus means “God saves”; Emmanuel means “God is with us”
• Non-Western cultures tend to have keen awareness of the meaning of a name.

Understanding Identity

• We learn who we are from others . . . and from objects.
• We discover the “self” as we experience the world and interact with others.
• First awareness
  – Hearing/learning our name
  – Seeing oneself in the mirror; I (subject) observe me (object)
• Maturation reinforces, alters or misrepresents the knowing of self.
• Two components:
  – Basic or “thought-through” self
  – Pseudo self, the unexamined and part of the system to which the person belongs.

“Will I survive? Who will give a damn, if no one knows who I am.”

From Jekyll & Hyde: The Musical
Sung by Linda Eder, Music by Frank Wildhorn
“Person” in its first meaning is “mask” or “guise;” sociologists suggest we are playing a role.

All experience is “raw” until reflected upon (Tad Guzie). Experience becomes awareness. The more chances to reflect upon ourselves as object, the more chances to find meaning.

We choose the events upon which to reflect, to invest ourselves and which will influence our identity.

We join a story in progress; the script given us forms the Me we know.

In group associations, belonging may trump belief in the group’s goals and objectives. Indeed, to become a member, the individual may choose to alter her identity.

All identity has a “back story” and a “future story.”
- Virtually impossible to move forward in life unless the future we see is congruent with our perceived “future story.”
- “Need time to get used to the idea.”
- Life transitions are disorienting.

Identity has sameness and pieces that are constantly changing.
- Preservation of the integrity of our identity is EVERYTHING!
- Congruency of identity is EVERYTHING!

The knowledge of self is fundamental to existence.

“Sameness” of identity brings continuity and stability.

“The parent doesn’t actually kill his child, but annihilates him by diminishing his identity until the child becomes nothing.”

Marie-France Hirigoyen

Stalking the Soul: Emotional Abuse and the Erosion of Identity (31)

This same phenomenon is often found among older adults being cared for by their adult children. The older adult is annihilated.

“Need time to get used to the idea.”

Life transitions are disorienting.

Changes in our life circumstances also change our sense of self.

Good self-awareness is foundational to weathering life’s blows.

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Functions of Identity

“It is manifest in all great changes of personal . . . life, which produce a kind of individual . . . dizziness, a feeling that the ground on which the person . . . has stood is being taken away, that self-identity . . . is being destroyed. This anxiety reaches its most radical form in the anticipation of the final loss.”

Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, vol 1 (197)

A Theological Context

- All theology must begin with the experience of the person. (Karl Rahner)
- “Otherness” of the Trinity . . . Absolutely different but intimately related, in who they are, but not what each is. (John D. Zizioulas)
- “Otherness” is the imago Dei.
- Theologians generally agree that the life-long search for identity is actually the search for Spiritual Presence

A Theological Context

“(B)y their power to know themselves in the depths of their being they [humankind] rise above the entire universe of mere objects. When they are drawn to think about their real selves they turn to those deep recesses of their being where God who probes the heart awaits them, and where they themselves decide their own destiny in the sight of God.”

Gaudium et Spes, para 14, 177

A Theological Context

- Christian theology states that we were all created by God and without duplicates
- “Christology is not a trivial issue. Getting Jesus right is at the heart of Christian Identity.” (Luke Timothy Johnson) We want others to fit our rationality, losing the mystery of the core person.
Symbols

How we symbolize and why it matters

The Human Person Symbolized

Clearing the confusion between “sign” and “symbol”

- Sign
  - Points to something apart from itself
  - Meaning is obvious
- Symbol
  - Introduces a reality to which it belongs
  - Has multiple meanings, even conflicting, dense or vague
  - Objects relevant to us become significant to memory recall

“The sign indicates, the symbol represents; the sign transmits directly, the symbol indirectly or obliquely; the sign announces, the symbol reminds or refers; the sign operates in the immediate context of space and time, the symbol extends the frame of reference indefinitely.”

F.W. Dillistone, Christianity and Symbolism (24)

The meaning of Symbols

- Inherent
- Ascribed or borrowed
- “Symbolic Interactionism”
  - meaning is socially formed
  - given meaning by the way in which we interact with the object
The Human Person Symbolized
Function of Symbols

• Invaluable to archeologists studying a people or culture; predates language
• Source of continuity or stability (as in identity)
• Symbols open us to deeper realities
• Humans invest themselves in symbols
• Easily discarded when no longer serving their purpose (like Identity)
• Unify and separate
• Inherent in every culture

“Faith is the name for the attitude which determines just how much we are going to see.”

Tad Guzle

A Theological Context
Symbol Defined

“A sensible reality which renders present to and involves a person subjectively in a transforming experience of transcendent mystery.”

Sandra M. Schneiders, Written That You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel
“The art of free society consists first in the maintenance of the symbolic code; and secondly in fearlessness of revision, to secure that the code serves those purposes which satisfy an enlightened reason. Those societies which cannot combine reverence to their symbols with freedom of revision, must ultimately decay whether from anarchy, or from the slow atrophy of a life stifled by useless shadows.

Alfred North Whitehead, Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect

“Symbols are not created, but are born out of life.”

Thomas Fawcett, The Symbolic Language of Religion

“The real significance of symbols (is) to afford us access through the visible world into a higher transcendent plane of being.”

Jean Danielou, S.J., The Lord of History

Three primary pathways to knowledge about the identity of a person.

1. There is knowledge owned by the person who decides when that knowledge will be revealed. We called this type “hiddenness within.”

2. The second is knowledge about us, especially that knowledge which others may reveal without our consent, and we called this type “hiddenness about” us.

3. The third type can be called “hiddenness for” us. This is knowledge about us that is evoked by symbols exclusively. The knowledge may lay dormant forever until aroused through the symbolic.

“Man’ self is a reflection of things with which he interacts.”

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi
And Eugene Rochberg-Halton