Attentiveness in hospital care
A qualitative-empirical study from an ethics of care perspective

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Introduction
This empirical study of attentiveness in hospital caregiving is conducted from an ethics of care perspective. More insight into the aspects and experiences of attentiveness in a particular health care setting contributes to the understanding of the caring side of health provision, a side that is often neglected in the usual deliberations about quality of care but that seems to be highly relevant from the patients' perspective\textsuperscript{1,2,3}. The concept of attentiveness and its relation to care have seldom been examined thoroughly and broadly.

Theoretical framework
Attention is in this study approached as a social phenomenon and therefore it is located at the intersection of attention as a cognitive capacity and attention that expresses itself as care or love. Attentiveness is understood as a practice that can, from two sides, create a space in which a relationship may arise. It is the difference between a care connection simply for instrumental reasons and a relationship between a caregiver and a patient in which good care can be delivered (that is, care that is received as care, care that makes people feel better). When attentiveness is understood as creating such an intersubjective space, the focus is on neither the caregiver nor the patient, instead the emphasis is on the relation. In order to be sensitive to the various possible aspects of the phenomenon, this study uses insights from different disciplines (see below)\textsuperscript{4,5,6,7,8,9}.

Focalization & concentration:
From a psychological perspective attention is understood to be the cognitive process of selectively concentrating on one aspect of the environment while ignoring other aspects.

Consciousness & perception:
In phenomenological literature, central questions are e.g. whether the selectivity of attention is voluntary or rather driven independently of the subject’s volition, and whether the relationship of consciousness to attention is one of necessity or sufficiency.

Moral value & love:
From an ethical perspective attentiveness can be good in itself: it is a way of acting or being in order to know (or to help) other people.

Wondering & waiting:
From a spiritual-philosophical perspective attentiveness asks for the suspension of one’s own thoughts and beliefs. It is waiting, open, and going beyond the obvious understanding.

Method
- Research design: empirical interpretative qualitative study
- Methods: ethnographic methods such as participant observation and informal interviews
- Field: oncology department of a general hospital in the Netherlands
- Participants: both caregivers (doctors and nurses) and care receivers (patients and their family)

References

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