

Prof. KRIS VANHAECHT on CORE VALUES OF CARE

COMMENCEMENT SPEECH FACULTY OF MEDICINE, JULY 2022

Dear Rector, Madam Vice-Rector, Dean, Vice-Deans, Programme Director, Fellow Professors,

Dear proud parents & partners, and of course, Dear nearly ex-students,

It is a great honour to be able to address you live here today and I would like to take you back in time, to just over a year ago.

On the night of Saturday June 5 to 6, 2021, I was admitted as a patient to the emergency department of an anonymous hospital, it is large and not far from here.

That evening I had severe abdominal pain radiating to my back, something I had been experiencing for about ten years, but the pain and urge to move were never as severe as that evening. The first suspicion was kidney stones. But shortly after the nightly CT-abdomen scans with contrast were taken, it turned out that I had severe acute pancreatitis. An acute inflammation of the pancreas.



And yes ... the experts among you ... and there are several in this audience ... are now thinking ... ha Vanhaecht has an alcohol problem ... because yes this condition is often caused by excessive alcohol consumption and if the CT and later the ultrasound show no gallstones ... yes we think ...

So the next morning, a young assistant comes to the bedside and asks "Sir, and tell me, how many units do you drink?" I said 3 to 5. You mean per day ... No, I said "per week". She smiled...

I got a lot of fluids through the drip for the rest of that day and week and I have to admit that Pethidine is really "good stuff".

The next morning, the same lady came to me again and asked "Sir, and tell me, how many units are you really drinking?" I said 3 to 5. You mean per day, don't you ... no, I said "per week" ... and the next day she came again and asked ... then the supervisor came and said "Kris, your story and imaging do not add up. I recommend an endoscopic ultrasound under general anaesthesia. And after some discussion of pros and cons, we decided together to do that the next morning. The cause of the pancreatitis was discovered: microlithiasis filled my gall bladder, fine stone dust, a "starry sky on the ultrasound" as a radiologist called it. So it wasn't from excessive alcohol consumption after all, and 10 days later I underwent a laparoscopic cholecystectomy, during which the friendly top doctor proudly told me he had done it in 15 minutes. Timely is a dimension of quality.

I have been teaching quality and patient safety in healthcare for about ten years. Together with doctors, nurses, managers, paramedics and support staff, I try to raise quality step by step, as you all will do from now onwards every day. I am therefore pleased that quality policy will in future be taught from the bachelor years onwards within our faculty, in order to prepare your successors even better for all our challenges and the many expectations of patients and their kin.

Prof. Kris Vanhaecht, Commencement Speech, Faculty of Medicine, KU Leuven, July 2022

Over the past period, I have learned ... thanks to my pancreas ... once again what this field is really about. Quality of care! Over the past 25 years, we have paid a great deal of attention to technical quality. We developed new techniques, procedures and protocols. Knowledge has been shared internationally.

And 21 years ago, in 2001, ... how old were you then ... in the book Crossing the Quality Chasm, quality was described in six dimensions: the care had to be safe, efficient, effective, timely, equal for everyone regardless of race, orientation or socio-economic status and sixthly, the care had to be patient-centred. In recent years, the focus has been on safety and efficiency. We obtained accreditation labels, established care pathways, quality indicators were reported publicly.



Now, 21 years later, we see that healthcare and quality thinking has changed. The world has become more complex, patients and staff are raising the bar ... and just as well.

Together with colleagues of the International Society for Quality in Healthcare, we developed an update of the model with the 6 dimensions. The model became more complex.

The main changes to this model are threefold:

Firstly, in addition to paying attention to the 6 original dimensions, we also ask sincere attention to the ecological footprint of the hospitals or your GP practice. So, think before you open yet another package and whether it would not be more sustainable to sterilise and reuse materials instead of constantly using all that disposable material, just look at the waste mountain your team leaves behind after an operation. Dim the lights and close the tap, as I hope you do at home.

Secondly, the original patient-centred dimension should be extended to person-centred, where we ask for attention not only for the patient and his/her relatives, but also for specific attention for the healthcare provider.

The challenge for healthcare management and policy is our human capital. How do we keep our employees in top condition and motivated to keep doing their top job? Our lord rector, professor Luc Sels, always reminds me of the three words that determine whether you will enjoy your job: mastery, autonomy and meaning.

And that brings us seamlessly to the third adjustment of our quality model. We need to further operationalise the person-centred dimension in 4 basic values for good care ... basic values for good care.

Treating each other with dignity and respect becomes crucial in every interaction, be it between patient, loved ones and care provider or between care providers.

In addition: Attention to a holistic frame of mind, the complete human being, a unique person. During my admission I sometimes heard people say "the pancreas is calling" ... no, I was not "the pancreas" ... I was Kris, a 47-year-old man who was anxious, worried about his family and the fact that he could not take his exams, it was mid-June, but who also loves photography, enjoys a good conversation and relaxes by watching SWAT with his 10-year-old son or singing along with his adolescent daughter to Harry Styles, Billie Eilish, ABBA or Charlotte De Witte ... With adolescents, the preference can change quickly ... but one thing is certain ... I was and am not just the pancreas of room 14 bed 2.

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One more tip to all new clinicians, be aware that if you close the curtain in the patient's room, it takes away the view but not the sound. In bed, we will still hear what you say about us, or about each other. So think dignity, respect and holism, also when you close the curtain.

A third core value is partnership. Attention to joint decision-making and co-production, like the doctor who, together with me, decided to perform the endoscopic ultrasound under general anaesthesia after all. But also partnership between healthcare providers. Cooperation between all disciplines without unnecessary hierarchy and with the psychological security of daring to ask the stupid question. That is the future.

Finally, in addition to dignity and respect, holism and partnership, there is a fourth basic value: empathy with kindness. Kindness is currently the buzz-word at international quality conferences. Kindness to patients and their relatives, introducing yourself clearly with name and function before examining a patient, having eye contact, a heartfelt smile. Saying good morning to your colleagues and of course also to your colleagues from the cleaning and facility department.



Doing that extra something for the patient or for each other, what we learned to offer each other as the "Mangomoment", that small extra gesture makes healthcare a little sweeter. Although we often underestimate the value of these small acts of kindness & leadership, it does become one of the challenges in our online society where everything must go fast fast fast.

I have already learned a lot from my pancreatitis. I have seen many things that could be better ... but I have also had the good fortune to feel what good and warm care is, in a large hospital ... not so far from here.

You have chosen a profession that many look up to. The wonderful things you can do for patients and their loved ones. The safe, efficient, effective, timely, equal and environmentally sustainable care you will provide. You will be able to experience and witness that every day.

Yes, I am grateful to the multidisciplinary team of which you will now be a member.

But the people I am most grateful to are not the professionals who just showed their expertise and did the right thing, but did it right.

Doing things right means that they lived out these four basic values.

They treated me with dignity and respect, they did not look at me as the pancreas on room 14 bed 2 but as an individual, they saw me as a partner in their quest and they were empathetic and friendly, like the professor from another department, who came by every morning at a quarter past 7 with his coffee in his hand and asked "and how are you?" the board member who asked daily "tell me your story of the day", the cleaning lady who told me her story of the day ... and yes, no Pethidine was needed ... or yes, unforgettable ... the beautiful young nurse who came with blushing cheeks to ask who the handsome junior doctor was who had just visited me ... those were my Mangomoments.

I am closing ...

You have a fantastic career ahead of you. At the reception after these speeches, raise the glass, have a good drink, but my advice is ... drink in moderation ... because I do not wish you a pancreatitis.

You will have to deal with difficult patients, difficult relatives and yes difficult colleagues from time to time. But you... you are the first generation of post-covid physicians. We all know that you have not had it easy and have missed out on a lot of things ... much, much respect for that, but as was described in JAMA, there is also such a thing as Post Covid & Post Traumatic Growth. Growth! The resilience and enduring commitment that your generation has already shown should make our whole society stronger.

Realise that you can make a fantastic contribution to our society. Be proud of yourself and, when times are tough, think back to today and to this fantastic achievement with that top diploma from this top university.

But also be humble, don't take risks with your patients, pride/hybris is the enemy, please spread the positive message about our fantastic healthcare but always ask questions when you have doubts about something and also dare to address people about their actions when you don't agree with them, always do that in a respectful, dignified and friendly way and please set a good example to your patients and colleagues and show your leadership by doing so.

Take good care of your patients and their relatives.

Take good care of your loved ones, enjoy life and above all take good care of yourself. Because only doctors in top condition can offer top care.

Thank you!

Kris VANHAECHT

Leuven Institute for Healthcare Policy, KU Leuven

www.krisvanhaecht.be kris.vanhaecht@kuleuven.be

