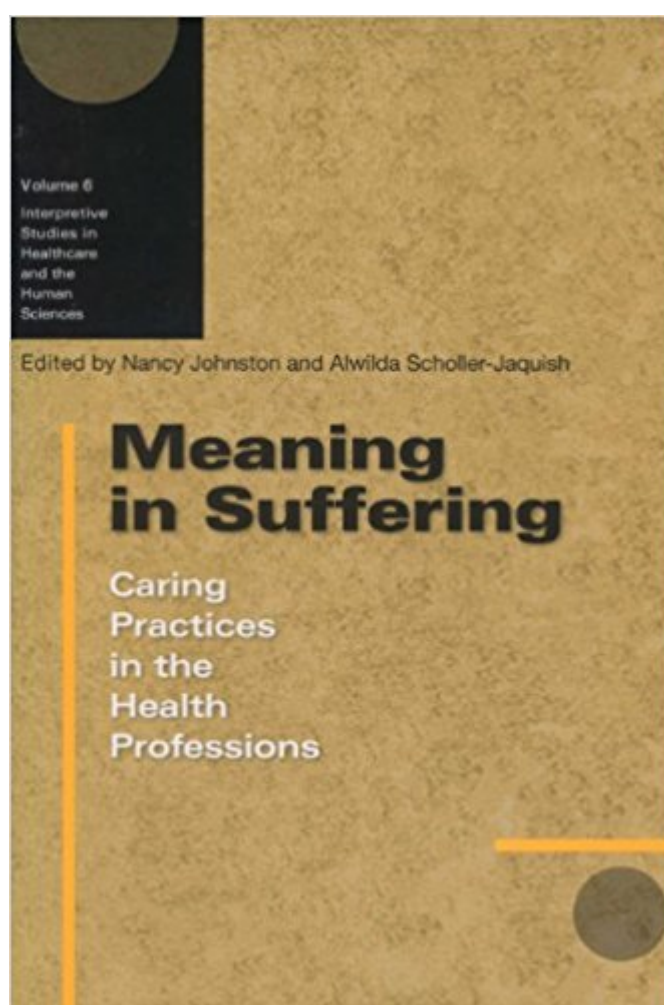


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Meaning In Suffering: Caring Practices In The Health Professions (Interpretive Studies In Healthcare And The Human Sciences)



Synopsis

Compelling, timely, and essential reading for healthcare providers, *Meaning in Suffering* addresses the multiplicity of meanings suffering brings to all it touches: patients, families, health workers, and human science professionals. Examining suffering in writing that is both methodologically rigorous and accessible, the contributors preserve first-hand experiences using narrative ethnography, existential hermeneutics, hermeneutic phenomenology, and traditional ethnography. They offer nuanced insights into suffering as a human condition experienced by persons deserving of dignity, empathy, and understanding. Collectively, these essays demonstrate that understanding the suffering of the other reveals something vital about the moral courage required to heal - and stay humane - in the face of suffering.

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Customer Reviews

Nancy Johnston, Ph.D., RN, is associate professor of nursing at York University, Toronto, Canada.

Alwilda Scholler-Jaquish, Ph.D., APRN, is associate professor of nursing at the University of Nevada, Reno.

Lying in a hospital bed some years ago -- dealing with a medical condition that was so serious that I had to reconcile myself not only to intense, and seemingly never-ending pain, but also to the recognition that there was a high probability that I would not be leaving that building alive -- I

realized that there is, indeed, another dimension to our existence, and that the price for admission is suffering. I survived, barely, and have been blessed with many more years to watch my children grow up, my daughters marry and have children themselves, and to also have a long, productive and satisfying career. But what I saw through that door changed me, as once one views and experiences first-hand the mystery of that dimension of suffering, our eyes and hearts are opened to understand more clearly and with greater empathy the plight of most of us who enter -- at one time or another -- that place of suffering. Quoting, "Suffering does not happen to us; we happen to suffer. Suffering is what we choose to do with pain," the editors set out to provide readers with a series of essays on how we might best "strengthen our capacity to remain fully present to individuals [who are suffering] and their families during times of profound loss...." Dr. Katheryn H. Kavanagh (BSN, Ph.D.), a medical anthropologist, opens with a discussion of one woman's chronic illness and uses a narrative ethnographic approach to focus on exploring how listening carefully to such patients offers a deeper understanding of their situation and plight. In this case, the patient, is a nurse, a friend and student, and using a metaphor of quilting, she brings together the pieces of this patient's story based upon "careful listening, and reading between the lines." Kavanagh's is a well-written, interesting and insightful exploration of a question, in the context of this single patient: "I wanted to know how one bears pain and uncertainty or the immediate reality of nausea and vomiting so violent that it seems it will not stop. Where is the meaning in such compromised existence?" Dr. Ingrid Harris (Ph.D.), a Canadian philosopher, then considers the broader question humankind has always asked: "What is suffering?" Offering a methodology in the context of moral suffering (loss of dignity), and mystery ("the breaking down [of] the most human way of being in the world"), she considers suffering in regard to speaking, personal responsibility, compassion, imagination, and change. Though still in a scholarly presentation paper format, her writing style is engaging, interesting and appropriately adjusted to the needs and interests of the intended audience of healthcare professionals. The third chapter, by Nancy E. Johnston, (RN, Ph.D.), of York University's School of Nursing in Toronto, considers the "universal human challenge" of trying to find meaning and joy "in one's circumstances, rather than being overtaken, diminished and embittered" when confronted with pain and suffering. Based upon her doctoral dissertation, Johnston's "hermeneutical, phenomenological study" illuminates "the nature of adversity and how people construct meaning in the face of great trial, hardship and tribulation." Using excerpts from narratives taken from twenty individuals writing or speaking with her about their experience with adversity, Johnston effectively illustrates how these individuals attempted to, or actually found meaning in their suffering amid their plight. Craig M. Klugman, (M.A., Ph.D.), a former science journalist, now scholar, brings the

theoretical background he attained while studying for degrees in medical anthropology and medical humanities to his chapter on exploring how family members used story-telling to bring "order out of the chaos that ensues from a loss." It's a fascinating perspective that rings true that developed out of a larger project by the author to "develop a resource list of grief support services needed for people living in Texas." Klugman profiles the "Your Opinion Matters" project methodology, his look at "published grief narratives," and examines the structures interviewees brought to their discussions: the plot, the intended goals and themes of their discussions; the physiological aspects of smells, sounds and light described; and, then considers their use of "healthcare vocabulary," their views of a "Good Death," and their comments regarding the isolation of the patient, their own mortality, their views on the afterlife, and their perceptions regarding the movement and appearance of the physical body of the patient that is suffering. Follows with a broader look at psychosocial, hermeneutic and psychocultural approaches to grief narratives.

Bonnie Ewing (RN, Ph.D.), on the nursing faculty at Adelphi University in New York, where she teaches nursing administration, health promotion and disease prevention, offers what is perhaps the first scholarly exploration of "what the experience of having a special wish fulfilled [by a wish-granting organization] means to a child with a life-threatening illness." Ewing taps into her background as cofounder of a Make-A-Wish Foundation and discusses her observations of these children and the choices they typically make during this time of great uncertainty and explores "the relationship between hope and the granting of a child's wish." Ewing outlines the assumptions and methodology of her study, the themes of requests and then discusses implications for future research. Her personal testimony regarding her deepened appreciation of the context of her work to "cherish and safeguard all that is poignantly precious about life" is seen throughout her contribution.

The final chapter, by Shelley Raffin Bouchal, (RN, Ph.D.), a Canadian on the Nursing faculty at the University of Calgary who brings extensive experience in hospice nursing to her writing, is an appropriate capstone essay that explores the question: "What it is like for nurses to care for dying individuals who are suffering." Drawing from the experiences of nine palliative care nurses and their descriptions of numerous patients, Bouchal's ethnographic study is a perceptive, informed, look at the role these individuals play in the nurse-patient relationship they have with dying patients. Of particular interest is her discussion of spirituality and suffering and -- like Viktor Frankl, and so many others -- she seeks to find meaning in suffering.

An essential purchase for all academic library collections and highly recommended for public libraries serving elderly communities.

R. Neil Scott
Middle Tennessee State University

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