Scenes of End-of-Life Situations for Healthcare Student Simulations

The students are invited to role-play in the semi-structured situations described below.

1. The scenarios should be read to the group out loud.
2. Then, the students should assume a role. The instructor can either assign a role to each student, or let the students choose the role they want to play.
3. When setting up the scene, consider the 5-WH questions: Who is in the scene, where (e.g., hospital home), when (time), what is happening, why is it happening (why does your role do what it is doing).
4. The scenarios should serve as the basis ("point of departure") for the role-play, but students can improvise and develop it further. During the role-play, the instructor should enrich the experience by implementing the following psychodrama techniques: soliloquy, double, mirroring, and/or role-reversal. The aim is to enhance the participants' own self-understanding and their perspective taking and empathy with their role and other characters in the scene. Note: John for boy can be Joan for female, etc.
5. After the role-play, students are invited to reflect on and share their experience. Consider the following questions for the discussion:

Which aspects of the situation did you connect to and which not?

Which aspects of the role did you connect to and which not?

During the role-play, what surprised you?

What did you feel and think as your role and as yourself playing that role?

What did you think and feel about other characters in the scene as your role and as yourself playing that role?

How easy or hard was it for you to "step into their shoos"?

What would you have changed in the scene?

The **first scene** focuses on the "conspiracy of silence" towards a child. John/ Joan, a 12-year-old boy/ girl, is not told the truth about his mother's serious state of health and both his father and his sister do not want him to find out. They think John is too young and inexperienced to handle such news, or to understand the implications. The concealment would end if that silence was broken and John knew the truth. The psychologist, however, advises them to be honest and tell John the truth in an age-appropriate way. The father finds it hard to express his emotions, he fears death and see it as a taboo topic. John's aunt (his mother's sister), who lost her husband to cancer two years ago, is a

religious person with spiritual beliefs about death. In what appropriate ways could this situation and conflict be resolved?

The **second scene** focuses on, Maria, the psychologist who provides palliative and bereavement care to patients where the mother is hospitalized. Maria lost her own mother the previous year, whom she loved dearly, and now she only has her father. Sometimes memories of her mother flood her with emotions. Maria sometimes over-identifies with her clients. In this case she over-identifies with John's father. Maria decides to consult her clinical supervisor. What steps could help Maria's own self-care? How should she conduct herself when she meets John's family?

The **third scene** focuses on John's family members' inability to adequately communicate the news that his mother has just died. John's family tries to get a little more time by pretending nothing happened, although the family atmosphere is in fact very tense and sad. Everyone tries to hide the sad news, and struggles to conceal their heartbreak. How could John learn about his mother's death in an age- appropriate way?

The **fourth scene** focuses on John's inability to mourn and be able to talk about it with classmates and teachers. The fact that John is in a new school, where he had to transfer because of his mother's illness, means that he is living through this difficult moment in an unfamiliar environment. His teacher, who is relatively new and inexperienced, reports that he is withdrawn with his classmates. She is concerned about a drop in his academic performance at school.
How can John learn to communicate to his classmates that his difficulties are due to the loss of his mother, thus establishing an empathic relationship with his peers?

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