

Bientraitance (Good Treatment) as a Factor in Well-Being at Work and Better Recovery for Patients

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Introduction

Marie-Jo Verluccho co-author with Marie-Christine Guillou of the *Bientraitance* Manual, Médiaspaul editions [1], July 2022, the booklet *Fighting Sexual Abuse* [2], diocese of Grenoble- Vienne, October 2019, and the *Bientraitance (good treatment) Pathway* (pending publication).

Who hasn't been in a vulnerable situation at least once in their life? The loss of a loved one, a physical or mental illness, an accident. An event that arises in life that leaves a feeling of the unknown, of losing control of one's life, of letting go.

This is the fate of all patients served by caregivers. It is also the state of the caregivers themselves, who sometimes experience challenges, illnesses, or fatigue. In this space—in hospitals, clinics, retirement homes, institutions for the disabled, and in-home care the goal is to question practices in order to improve the well-being of caregivers and, by extension, the well-being of patients themselves.

What is Meant by *Bientraitance* or Good Treatment?

In France, it was thanks to the persistence of a nurse that the word "*bientraitance*" appeared in the dictionary, with the idea of good treatment towards children and the elderly or dependent. It counters the word "abuse." "Good treatment would therefore be informed by the fact that abuse exists. Thus, it appears necessary to take abuse into account, considering its causes in light of its consequences: malaise, low self-esteem, confinement, depression, guilt, failure, somatization, suicide [3]." The INSPQ, the National Institute of Public Health of Quebec, has published several surveys on the factors of abuse (towards the elderly, children, etc.). Abuse is defined as "all forms of neglect, violence or abuse likely to harm physical and psychological integrity. It involves both acts omitted or acts committed. Abuse is considered to be the product of the juxtaposition and mutual influence of various factors: individual, familial, socioeconomic and cultural [4]". Human beings are relational beings. Therefore, when several people meet, there may be risks of domination, abuse of power, mistreatment such as contempt, verbal, physical, psychological violence, occasional or repeated.

Humans are also sensitive beings. Everything they feel—feelings, emotions—can have pleasant or unpleasant repercussions. They may arrive at work gloomy because they missed their train, and their state of mind affects their relationships with colleagues. Or they may arrive cheerful because the birds were singing, the sun was shining, and their neighbor was smiling as they left their home. And here again, their relationships are impacted.

We can apply all of these considerations to the healthcare system.

***Bientraitance* (Good Treatment) in Hospital Services**

For decades, health authorities have been implementing protocols for patient welfare. Hospitalized patients and their loved ones regularly report inhumane and disrespectful behavior on the part of healthcare professionals. The French High Authority for Health defines it as follows: "Property welfare is a comprehensive approach to patient and user care, and to welcoming those close to them, aimed at promoting respect for the rights and freedoms of patients and users, listening to their needs, and preventing mistreatment." The professional approach to patient welfare is defined as "a way of being, acting, and speaking, attentive to others, responsive to their needs and requests, and respectful of their choices and refusals." In some settings, such as in France, professional welfare charters are posted in healthcare facilities. They are based on several pillars such as communication, listening, empathy, kindness, respect for dignity, confidentiality, etc. In 2024, this same High Authority for Health will release a Guide to recommend best practices [5]. This guide helps identify the risks of mistreatment towards any person in a vulnerable situation when words, actions, failures of action, or gestures violate their rights, needs, or physical or mental health. Based on this diagnosis, it is possible to list everything that can prevent them. We therefore see that this concept has been carefully considered. Texts, reports, and action plans have been developed. However, the facts still too regularly report signs of mistreatment towards patients, for example, the elderly or dependents, but also among caregivers, with burnouts, sick leave, suicides, etc. This observation leads us to believe that good treatment is, firstly, a position that must be developed from childhood and, secondly, that it must begin with oneself. How can we be kind to others if we are not kind to ourselves?!

This is why we propose addressing the following areas of improvement: self-kindness, workplace kindness, and other-kindness.

Areas of Improvement in *Bientraitance* [6]

Four verbs sum up well what kindness looks like:

- Welcoming each person in their uniqueness and their story by being in their presence, completely available at a given time, being open to everything that makes them different and discovering them as a treasure. Others are always an adventure.
- Listening [7] to the words of others and their non-verbal language [8] and listening to yourself, paying attention to what is happening inside you, your feelings, and your emotions. Listening with empathy and kindness in a climate of mutual trust.

- Supporting and moving forward with others as with a companion, respecting their dignity and freedom. Maintain the right distance and posture to respect the person's rhythm in a relationship without control, manipulation, patronizing, seduction, or domination.
- Regularly assess and observe your way of relating to others and adjust it if necessary. Assessment allows you to reframe and improve your way of relating to others. It can be done as a team of caregivers and patients, or as a multidisciplinary team, by asking yourself the following questions: Have I been kind? How might I have been abusive? What was missing in the relationship that would have made it more balanced and just? It is therefore important, based on these postures of kind treatment, to define areas for improvement for yourself, for your team, and in all types of relationships. We stated above that kind treatment must begin with self-care.

***Bientraitance* Towards Oneself**

We don't always feel like we're not taking enough care of ourselves. However, our bodies can let us know; back pain, increased fatigue, and irritation are all signs of discomfort and sometimes even abuse. We can ignore these symptoms. However, this neglect of self-care has repercussions in our relationships with family, coworkers, and the people we care for or support. Indeed, during these moments of fatigue, we are more irritable and have more difficulty containing unpleasant emotions such as sadness, anger, or fear [9]. To avoid collateral damage—that is, damage to others caused by our attitude—it is necessary to identify and prevent the abuse we experience.

Better self-knowledge allows us to fulfill our basic needs, such as:

- the number of hours of sleep needed to be sufficiently rested before starting a new workday,
- words of encouragement to feel in the right place,
- the need for recognition for a mission accomplished [10].
- moments of joy that provide pleasure, courage, and motivation [11].

Better self-knowledge also allows us to value our expertise by highlighting it, to set boundaries, and to know how to say no when they risk being exceeded. Thus, by better listening to ourselves and our own needs, we are able to listen to others, understand their emotions, and meet their expectations.

Well-Being at Work

There are three indicators of unhappiness at work: job strain, lack of recognition, and hostile behavior. Strain at work is the combination of limited decision-making latitude and high psychological demands. The following questions should be asked:

- Is the amount of work appropriate for the time allotted?
- Are the demands relevant and not contradictory?
- Does the work require a period of intense concentration? Is it appropriate for skills? Does it allow room for creativity?
- Is there support from management?

- Are there rest periods to relieve stress?

Recognition is necessary for well-being at work; it's like gasoline for an engine. It gets things moving, enables creativity, and provides dynamism. Recognition is expressed through gratitude, a smile, encouragement, and a salary. Hostile behavior is expressed through negative or unpleasant verbal or physical communication, as well as inappropriate, repetitive, harassing, and unjustified requests. But we need to set limits, give our points of view in a calm manner and receive positive words [12].

Initiatives are being launched in the workplace. One such initiative, born in Montreal, has been mandatory in Belgian companies since 2014, and is now being developed in the hospital sector. It involves "sentinel employees," also known as "benevolent workers [13]." These employees monitor the well-being of their colleagues on a daily basis. They identify signs of distress, provide guidance to improve the situation, and review the situation as a team.

Bientraitance in All Types of Relationships

What we have just discussed in the workplace can be applied to all types of relationships, whether in the circle of intimate relationships, professional, friendly, or neighborly relationships, or more distant relationships (such as retailers, bankers, etc.). We cannot expand on the different ways of communicating, such as nonviolent [14], positive [15], or assertive [16] communication, in this article. We will also mention the positive effects of gratitude [17] on personal and relational well-being. We invite you to explore these various topics on your own (see references below).

And let's not be afraid to cultivate joy. For it provides a sense of peace and transmits it to the people around us. It allows the secretion of dopamine, the source of the feeling of well-being. Through humor and laughter, we can act in a kind manner. Humor makes those who use it sympathetic; it encourages listening, with greater kindness, provided it is neither ironic nor mocking, and we do not overuse it. It helps defuse any emerging tension. Through the laughter it transmits, it releases the production of endorphins [18-19], the hormones of well-being.

Conclusion

Taking care of others is dependent on taking care of ourselves. One cannot exist without the other. "Good treatment cannot be decreed, it must be chosen, experienced, spread and multiplied, in a permanent process because nothing is fixed once and for all. Basically, it is a question, at every moment, of being good, of remaining so or of becoming so."

REFERENCES

1. [Editions Mediaspaul Canada.](#)
2. www.luttercontrelesabus.fr
3. [Bientraitance Manual, éditions Médiaspaul et Médiaspaul Canada.2022:13.](#)
4. [INSPQ.](#)

5. In French: Bientraitance et gestion des signaux de maltraitance en établissement, HAS France. octobre 2024.
6. For this paragraph, we rely mainly on the Manual of Good Treatment by Marie-jo Verlucco and Marie-Christine Guillou.
7. American psychologist Carl Rogers explores how to relate well to others and offers advice on how to listen. He wrote several books on the subject, including The Development of the Person.
8. In 1973, Massachusetts researcher Mary Rowe studied nonverbal signals sent to others through different bodily channels. These signals can be interpreted as positive or negative messages.
9. American psychologist Paul Ekman identified six primary emotions: joy, sadness, fear, anger, disgust, and surprise.
10. See below for well-being at work.
11. The mystic Maurice Zundel believes that joy is the very criterion of life, he writes this: "Joy invigorates, joy is strength, joy illuminates us, joy nourishes consciousness, this joy of being a Presence."
12. The Losada ratio (Chilean psychologist, University of Michigan) represents the number of positive interactions divided by the number of negative interactions for a team to be efficient: 6 positive for 1 negative, then the team is very efficient. This ratio is also useful in interpersonal communications, it takes at least 5 positive words to make one negative criticism forget.
13. Dr. Philippe Rodet, an emergency physician by training, has traveled the world to countries sometimes at war. He has observed the effects of stress in the workplace. He has written several books on this subject, including La bienveillance source d'espoir (Kindness: A Source of Hope), published by Eyrolles, February 2024, and La bienveillance au travail (Kindness at Work), published by Eyrolles, March 2019.
14. NVC, a communication method developed by Marshall B. Rosenberg, an American psychologist. Through our kind attitude and language, we can inspire others to adopt this same posture.
15. Alain Labruffe, Doctor of Letters in economics and work psychology, has written several books including Positive Communication, Strategies and Techniques, Bordeaux University Press and Self-management, the art of surviving at work, AFNOR editions, 2010.
16. Gérard Shaw a écrit plusieurs livres dont Le pouvoir de la communication assertive, éditions Communication excellence, juillet 2023.
17. Robert Emmons a écrit plusieurs livres sur la gratitude, comme La gratitude, éditions Pocket janvier 2019. Il développe les bienfaits de la gratitude, vertu capable de procurer du bonheur, d'apaiser corps et âmes.
18. The hypothalamus produces endorphin, the hormone of well-being, calm, and happiness.
19. Bientraitance Manual, already cited.