

Lalochezia

Many nurses and midwives are so adept at swearing that they can make truckies blush. Sailors and sportsmen gather at their feet to learn the fine art of uttering profanities.

There is, however, a small righteous subset of health professionals who are absolutely determined to take offence every time a patient gets a bit swear-y. These people seem to have no tolerance for the use of vulgar, foul language to express and relieve stress or pain. There is emotional release to be had when uttering indecent or filthy words.

The phenomenon of emotional release through swearing even has a name: “lalochezia” – a word formed from the Greek *lalia* (speech) and *chezo* (to relieve oneself).

Words only have the power that we ascribe to them. As a judge sitting on cases regarding obscene language charges said, the use of swear words in Australia is very common in music, poetry, drama and literature, by ordinary people in the street, and by those in the corridors of power. The notion that they cause offence is an individual's decision to react, not because of the rarity or harshness of the words themselves.

Anyway, if we are fair dinkum about being patient-focused then swearing can be very useful.

Swear words are great adjectives – think of them as something akin to the pain scale. Instead of using the “0 = no pain and 10 = worst pain imaginable” routine, some of our patients will use their own qualitative and quantitative pain scale. It might include descriptors like “no worries”, “a bit of an ache”, “painful”, “bloody painful”, “really bloody painful”, “bastard of an ache”, “as painful as fuck”, etc.

Maybe it's those dopey “zero tolerance” signs (and the dopey attitudes they engender) that make some clinicians react to swear words as if they are weapons. As I have argued previously (see meta4RN.com/zero), we should have zero tolerance for zero tolerance and not spend so much time and effort trying to shut-down people from expressing their distress.

Swearing not only communicates emotions but, as per the definition of “lalochezia”, acts as a pressure valve for those emotions. In clinical practice we should not be too quick to try turn off that pressure valve – it may prevent an explosion.

Citation:

McNamara, Paul. (2014) Lalochezia, meta4RN, 12th July 2014, <http://meta4RN.com/lalochezia>

lalochezia

Noun

1. The use of vulgar or foul language to relieve stress or pain.
2. Emotional release gained by uttering indecent or filthy words.

Etymology: Greek lalia (speech) + chezo (to relieve oneself)