



Compassionate Care in a Health Education Setting: A Scoping Review

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Abstract

Background: Compassionate care represents a foundational value in healthcare education, essential for cultivating empathy and holistic patient engagement. Despite its recognized significance, integrating compassionate care into educational curricula remains complex. We systematically explored its conceptualization, implementation, and pedagogical strategies within health education to inform curriculum development and professional training.

Methods: Scoping review using the Arksey and O'Malley framework. Literature search in Dec 2024 in the Scopus, Emerald Insight, and Wiley Online Library databases, English publications from the last 10 years, focussing on compassionate care in health education. Flow diagram for the PRISMA review scoping shows the search and selection procedures. Tools from the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) for thematic analysis. Overall, 4,119 articles were screened, and 21 studies met the inclusion criteria.

Results: Compassionate care enhances empathy, communication, and professional behaviour among students. Development is carried out through experiential learning, narrative reflection, clinical practice, and the role of mentors. Programs like the Kind Care Bundle and empathy training have proven effective. However, implementation faces obstacles such as academic pressure, a rigid educational culture, and a lack of communication training. A structured curriculum approach and an inclusive learning environment are necessary to sustainably cultivate compassion competence in health education.

Conclusion: Compassionate care is an essential component in healthcare education that contributes to the formation of empathetic attitudes and patient-centered care. The integration of compassion values into the curriculum through reflective approaches, clinical practice, and mentorship guidance is important to produce competent, humanistic healthcare professionals who are ready to face the challenges of professional practice.

Keywords: Compassionate care; Medical student; Nursing student; Scoping review

Introduction

In the past decade, compassion in healthcare has become a major concern for researchers, educa-

tors, doctors, policymakers, and patients (NHS). Compassionate care is defined as acts of empa-



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thy, genuine concern, and recognition of the emotional, physical, and spiritual needs of patients (1). This concept, existed since the era of Florence Nightingale, remains a fundamental element in modern nursing practice and education (2). Compassionate care not only has a positive impact on patient outcomes but also creates a supportive learning environment for health students, preparing them to meet patients' emotional needs in the future (3,4). In sectors such as palliative care, compassion plays a central role in responding to complex suffering (5). Patients who receive compassionate care demonstrate higher levels of satisfaction, quality of life, and recovery (1,6). In addition, this practice also increases job satisfaction and reduces turnover among healthcare workers (7,8).

Although compassion tends to be innate, life experiences also influence it, making compassion training important in health education curricula (6, 10). Various curriculum strategies have proven effective in enhancing empathy and compassion (9). Diverse learning experiences help deepen the understanding of this concept, and direct contact with various patients encourages a more patient-centered approach (10–12). Training programs focused on empathy and compassion prepare students to face practical challenges more effectively (13). Nursing students who experience various difficulties during their education need to be understood by creating education strategies based on compassion, emotional management, and mindfulness (14). Although many studies discuss compassionate care among healthcare workers (9,15,16), exploration in education is still limited. We aimed to identify and analyze the literature on how compassion is defined, developed, and applied during education for health profession students, including current curriculum approaches.

Methods

Study Design

This study used a scoping review design to explore compassionate care in health education. This approach was chosen because it could identify existing concepts, practices, challenges, and research gaps. The review followed the Arksey and O'Malley framework updated by Levac (17) as well as the guidelines from the Joanna Briggs Institute. The process includes six steps: formulating the research question; searching for relevant articles; selecting articles according to criteria; extracting important data from the selected articles; organising and analysing the data; conducting limited consultation to strengthen the results.

Article search was conducted in Dec 2024 through the Scopus, Emerald Insight, and Wiley Online Library databases. The literature search using boolean operators was conducted. In two stages, the first stage begins with the keyword 1 compassionate care. At the beginning, the search was expanded to ensure topic coverage. No search was conducted on grey literature. The second stage was conducted using keyword 2 “compassionate care” AND “nursing student” OR “healthcare student” OR “medical student”. The search strategy is limited to English-language journal articles published from 2013 to 2024 (Table 1).

Identification and selection of literature

The articles that have been obtained are analysed for differences and duplications. The researchers conducted the selection by reading the titles, studying the abstracts, and then examining the full texts of the selected articles. Fig. 1 explains the process of searching and selecting articles as literature using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analysis for Scoping Review (PRISMA-SR) (18).

Table 1: Results Search articles in the database

No	Data bases	Stage 1		Stage 2	
		Keyword 1	Number of Articles identified	Keyword 2	Number of Articles identified
1	Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY ("compassionate care") AND PUBYEAR > 2013 AND PUBYEAR < 2024	1,254	(TITLE-ABS-KEY ("compassionate care") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ("nursing student") OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ("healthcare student") OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ("medical student"))	114
2	Emerald Insight	"compassion* care"	223	"compassionate care" AND ("nursing student") OR ("healthcare student") OR ("medical student")	187
3	Wiley online library	"compassionate care"	2,642	"compassionate care" AND "nursing student" OR "healthcare student" anywhere	47
	Jumlah		4,119		348

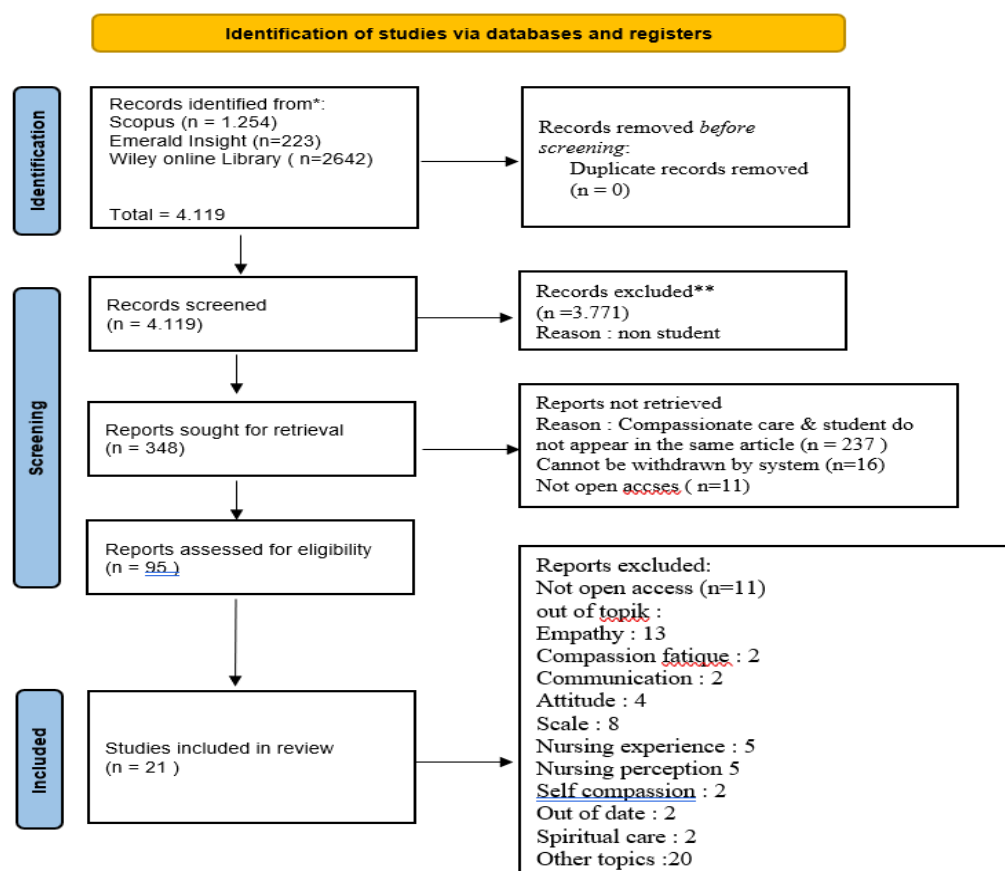


Fig. 1: Prisma Flow Diagram

Item data and data collection

The full-text articles were read and extracted using the JBI (Joanna Briggs Institute) tool (19)(19). The study selection process in this scoping review follows the standard PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) flow. The literature search was conducted through three main databases, namely Scopus (n = 1,254), Emerald Insight (n = 223), and Wiley Online Library (n=2,642), with 4,119 initial findings.

No duplicates were found in the initial stage, so all articles (n = 4,119) proceeded to the screening stage. At this stage, 3,771 articles were excluded because they did not involve student participants, who are the focus population in this study. Of the 348 articles remaining for further review, 264 articles could not be retrieved for analysis for various reasons: 237 articles did not mention the terms compassionate care and student simultaneously, 16 articles could not be accessed by the system, and 11 articles were not available in open access format. As many as 95 articles were successfully selected and analysed at the feasibility assessment stage. However, 74 articles were excluded again because they did not align with the topic or focus of the study. Finally, 21 articles were deemed to meet the criteria and were included in the final review analysis.

Eligibility criteria

The study is included in the final synthesis. Researchers are interested in studies that primarily aim to explore compassionate care in the context of health workforce education, with subjects being medical and nursing students. The broad categories of results explored in this review include: a general description of compassionate care in health education, the development of compassionate care in the context of health workforce education, training programs or interventions to enhance compassionate care among health stu-

dents, and primary and secondary studies using qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods.

Results

Data Extraction

Data is extracted from selected articles that meet the criteria. Data extraction includes: Study title, authors, year, country, research design, number of participants, type of education, and findings. From the final synthesis, 21 articles that align with the theme to be reviewed in the scoping review were retained. The description of the data extraction can be seen in Table 2.

Compassionate Care in Health Education

From the 21 studies reviewed, the main theme that emerged is the importance of experiential learning in shaping students' compassionate care. Nursing students develop an understanding of compassionate care through a combination of theoretical knowledge and diverse practical experiences (11). Values, attitudes, and perceptions of students are greatly influenced by learning experiences, particularly clinical practice (20). Reflective practices, such as the use of stories, help students understand personal values and expectations regarding patient-centered care (24). The ability to reflect on interactions with patients greatly influences the learning of compassion (16). Compassionate care is not only understood theoretically, but is also reinforced through direct experience and deep reflection (23). Students develop compassionate care through real interactions with patients, observation of clinical supervisors, emotional simulations, and narrative reflection (16,21,24). Barriers to compassion in various disciplines are important to study for the development of more effective educational strategies (24,35).

Table 2: Data extraction research design, understanding, compassionate care in health education

Author	Year, Country	Types of Education	Description of compassionate care in health education
(McSherry et al., 2017) (20)	2016 United Kingdom	Nursing	Reflective models assist nursing students in exploring the art of compassionate care, improving their self-awareness and communication skills. The practice of reflection allows nursing students to gain insight into humanizing care, essential for effective nursing in a community setting.
(Hilli & Sandvik, 2020) (21)	2020 Norwegia	Nursing	According to nursing students and supervisors, a caring relationship between supervisors and students, based on commitment, respect, and responsibility, is very important as a basis for learning and development. This study emphasizes the importance of <i>preceptorship</i> in the formation of professional nurses. The transition from student to professional nurse is guided by learning outcomes and reflective practice.
(M.Fopka-Kowalczyk,2024) (22)	2024 Polandia	Medical	Compassionate care involves understanding and supporting those who are suffering, emphasizing interpersonal skills and warmth. Incorporating compassion into health education can change perceptions and encourage compassionate attitudes among students .
(D.J.Hunter et al., 2018) (11)	2018 Scotlandia	Nursing	Emphasizing the need for increased training and support for nursing students to improve <i>compassionate care</i> in <i>emergency departments</i> . The literature suggests the use of real-life examples to teach compassionate care effectively. This study explores the experiences and challenges of nursing students in providing compassionate care in emergency departments .
(Doran et al., 2020) (23)	2020 United kingdom	Nursing	Reflective learning and the use of stories about the experience of giving and receiving care can contribute to the development of knowledge, skills, and confidence that enable nursing students to provide <i>compassionate care</i> in practice. The reflective model used by students helps explore the art of compassionate care.
(Adamson & Dewar, 2015) (24)	2015 United Kingdom	Nursing	Reflective lessons and the use of experiential stories when giving and receiving care can support the development of knowledge, skills, and confidence, thus helping nursing students in providing <i>compassionate care</i> .
(Rodriguez-Moreno et al., 2024) (25)	2024 Spanyol	Medical	Results showed that participants who underwent Compassion Cultivating Training (CCT) experienced a significant reduction in stress and anxiety immediately after the program. The Compassion Base Program (CBP) has been shown to reduce psychological distress while improving core skills in compassionate care, such as mindfulness, humanism or emotional regulation
(Bickford et al., 2019) (26)	2019 Inggris	13 Medical , 10 Nursing	The three main themes of compassionate care are: 1. Connection, the importance of personal relationships with patients; 2. Care: provide empathic and caring care; 3. Respect: treat patients with dignity and acknowledge their individuality. The implications of education, emphasizing the need for educational programs that focus on developing compassion in health care students, are essential to improving dementia care.

Table 2: Continued...

(Shrivastava et al., 2024) (27)	2024 India	Medical	The integration of empathy in medical practice provides many benefits for patients, healthcare workers, and healthcare systems. However, considering that various factors affect the development of empathy in medical students, educational strategies are needed to foster empathy in order to realize patient-centered care and doctor-patient relationships.
(Su et al., 2020) (16)	2020 Hongkong	Nursing	Compassionate care is defined as the unification of empathy and the desire to alleviate patient suffering. Students recognise the importance of compassionate care in providing patient care. The practice environment influences the development and sustainability of compassionate care. Nurse educators must integrate compassionate care into the nursing education curriculum.
(Christiansen et al., 2015) (28)	2015 Inggris	Nursing, Midwifery Medical	The results show a high level of consistency between healthcare workers' and Healthcare Students' understanding of <i>compassionate care</i> and the ways in which it is contextualized in their daily practices. Compassionate care is described as an emotional connection between patient and caregiver, emphasizing personal values in health education. This study highlights the need for compassionate care as a core professional value in health education.
(Nathoo et al., 2021) (29)	2021 United Kingdom	Nursing	Three main themes emerged from this research: 1. the meaning of affection, 2. external factors influencing affection in care, and 3. internal factors influencing affection in care. Compassionate care is very important for therapeutic relationships and enhancing holistic care in health education. Compassion can be taught through experiential learning and role modelling in the nursing curriculum.
(Ulloque et al., 2023) (30)	2023 Argentina	Medical	The development of compassionate care is influenced by academic training and teaching methodology. This study highlights the importance of empathy in medical practice for effective patient care.
(Su et al., 2021) (16)	2021 Hongkong	Nursing	A positive practice environment with experienced clinical instructors and appropriate work assignments needs to be promoted by educators and administrators to support nursing student learning." This study emphasizes the need to integrate compassionate care experiences in nursing education.
(Schairer et al., 2022) (31)	2022 Amerika Serikat	Medical	Identify three forms of compassionate care learning in medical students : 1. Physical navigation, 2. Interpersonal navigation, and 3. Perspective taking . Students learn to align physical actions, communicate effectively, and understand the patient's background and self-bias. This study emphasizes the need for integration between affective training and practical skills in the curriculum, so that students are able to apply compassionate care authentically within the limitations of the clinical world.
(Sundus et al., 2020) (32)	2020 Pakistan	Nursing	Compassionate care involves holistic care through education, counseling, and addressing the patient's needs for healing and care. Students emphasize the importance of a sympathetic response to the patient's suffering. Compassionate care can be nurtured through practice, observation, and reflection.
(Yu et al., 2021) (33)	2021 Australia	Nursing	Caring is a core value in nursing education, with empathy being a key expression of this caring. Higher empathy in healthcare professionals correlates with improved patient satisfaction and health indicators. The study evaluated interventions that significantly improved empathy in nursing students, highlighting its importance in health education.

Table 2: Continued...

(Hofmeyer et al., 2018) (34)	2018 Australia	Nursing	Compassionate care involves understanding and eliminating the patient's pain and suffering. This requires active listening, empathy, and respect, treating patients as individuals rather than just their illness. This study highlights the need for compassionate training in the nursing curriculum to improve patient outcomes and officer well-being. Students learn to translate compassion into action, fostering resilience and teamwork in clinical settings..
(Cooper & Gheihman, 2021) (3)	2021 Amerika Serikat	Medical	The Kind Care curriculum promotes empathy and shifts attitudes toward compassionate care among medical students, filling gaps in health education. Students reflect on their personal experiences and role-playing using the Kind Care Bundle to improve their skills. Emphasizing kindness in education can improve the patient-physician relationship and reduce burnout among trainees.
(Dev et al., 2019) (35)	2019 Selandia baru	Nursing and Medical	Compassion is considered a key principle of clinical practice in nursing, emphasizing its importance in health education. The study highlights the need for tailored interventions to improve compassion across a wide range of healthcare professions. Understanding compassion barriers can inform the development of effective health education strategies.
(Hojat et al., 2020) (36)	2020) Amerika	Medical	Volunteer students in the No One Dies Alone (NODA) program have significantly higher empathy scores than nonvolunteers. Research confirms that participation in pro-social activities can be an early indicator of empathic orientation in medical education. Volunteering in caring for terminally ill patients fosters a higher level of empathy among medical students.

Development of Compassionate Care in Healthcare Education Settings

Several training programs have been developed to foster compassionate care among health students (3,11,12,21,24) . Cooper & Gheihman proposed the Kind Care Bundle, a curriculum that integrates observation, practice, and reflection, to teach compassionate care behaviours to medical students (3). This curriculum allows students to connect their learning with its impact on patients. Diverse practical experiences have also proven to enrich students' understanding of compassionate care (11).

Empathy and effective communication training enhance students' ability to express compassion (12). Narrative reflection and story-based learning help them understand patients' needs more holistically (37). The Cultivating Compassion program, based on mindfulness and cognitive exer-

cises over 8 sessions, successfully fostered empathy and improved students' self-care (38).

Real exposure to patients serves as a means to train empathy and therapeutic communication (16). Nursing educators and clinical instructors act as important role models in shaping students' compassion practices (16). The integration of compassionate values into the nursing curriculum includes teaching empathy, ethical care, and a holistic approach (33). In addition, educational technology can also strengthen a learning environment that supports the development of empathy and effective communication (34).

Training programs or interventions to enhance compassionate care among health students

Various training programs and interventions have been implemented to enhance compassionate care among health students. Here are some examples of programs and interventions that have been reported in the literature (Table 3).

Table 3: Intervention programs to improve compassionate care in health students

No	Programs/ Interventions	Description	Result	Reference
1	Experience-Based Practical Training	Integrating diverse clinical experiences to help students understand the importance of compassionate care through direct interactions with patients.	Variations in practical learning experiences affect nursing students understanding of compassionate care; interactions with various patient groups can develop their skills.	Hunter et al (2018) (11)
2	The Kind Care curriculum	Teaching good and compassionate care behaviours to medical students through a combination of knowledge, skill-based practice, and reflection.	This program can help medical students reconnect with the values that brought them to the medical field, reduce burnout, and increase job satisfaction.	Cooper & Gheihman (2021) (3)
3	Empathy and Communication Training	Focus on developing communication and empathy skills through role-playing and simulation of interactions with patients.	Good communication skills can enhance nursing students' ability to express understanding and compassion towards patients, which is important in nursing practice.	Alabdulaziz et al (2020) (12)
4	Reflection and Story-Based Learning	Using stories to help students understand the needs of others and their own values, as well as plan patient-centered care.	Reflective learning through storytelling can help nursing students understand patient needs and develop more individualised care.	Adamson & Dewar (2015) (24)
5.	Cultivating compassion	An 8-session curriculum that integrates awareness-based strategies and cognitive exercises. These sessions are designed to guide students through the process of understanding what compassion means not only as a concept but also in its practical application. The practical design of this program makes it easy to adapt and integrate into educational schedules.	The intervention successfully fostered a deeper sense of self-care and outward empathy, significantly enhancing compassionate care. This indicates that medical students are better able to understand, share, and act based on the emotional experiences of others after the training.	Mehta et al (2024) (37)
6	Nordic Learning Model	The training focusses on helping nursing students develop compassionate care by emphasising the importance of showing attention and empathy in every patient interaction. Preceptors model caring behaviour by working "side by side" with students.	This model emphasises collaboration between nursing students and instructors in creating a learning environment that supports the development of compassionate care skills. Teaching in a clinical setting is not just about transferring theoretical knowledge, but also about guiding students through the process of self-reflection and transformation.	Hilli dan Sandvik Hilli & Sandvik (2020) (21)

Discussion

This scoping review synthesises empirical literature from the past decade regarding compassionate care in the context of healthcare education. Compassionate care is a crucial aspect that must be taught from the early stages of healthcare education (20,21). The integration of compassionate values into nursing education is crucial in laying the foundation for future health professionals to provide empathetic and effective care (16). Compassionate care has also been proven to contribute to increased recovery expectations, accountability, and patient control over their health, as well as creating safer care and enhancing patient happiness (39). Fostering compassion among healthcare professionals is important not only morally but also impacts clinical outcomes and organisational performance (40). This ap-

proach supports better health outcomes and increases patient satisfaction by fulfilling the basic human needs for connection and relationships (16). Approaches such as reflective learning, role modelling, and storytelling methods have proven to enhance understanding and skills in compassionate care (41). Empathy, as the core of compassion, is an essential skill in providing effective healthcare services and contributes to better treatment outcomes. One of the main benefits of empathy in healthcare is its impact on building trust and strengthening the doctor-patient relationship, allowing patients to be more open about their complaints, leading to more accurate diagnoses (27).

Integrating compassion into health profession education helps students develop the ability to

care for themselves and others in a balanced manner, supporting holistic care practices (mind, body and spirit) (11). Affective empathy learning—which includes emotional resonance and deep understanding of patient experiences—is crucial in fostering compassionate actions (16). Reflection becomes key in internalising compassionate care (3, 20, 23, 32). Deep reflection from clinical experiences allows students to adjust their care approaches to the unique needs of patients (24). Compassionate care skills can be trained through experience-based practical training, narrative reflection, and observation of positive role models demonstrated by clinical mentors (12,21). Curriculum models such as the Kind Care Bundle developed by Cooper & Gheihman, serve as concrete examples of how compassion learning can be integrated through theory, reflection, and practice (3). A supportive educational environment, including support from mentors and peers, plays a significant role in shaping students' compassion practices. Positive team relationships help shape a culture of empathy and effective communication (28). A culture of compassion within organisations, such as the Welsh NHS, demonstrates the importance of a supportive institutional climate (40). In addition, technologies such as digital storytelling have proven to support the enhancement of reflection and empathetic understanding among student (38,42).

An unsupportive work environment, high pressure, and minimal communication training are the main obstacles to the implementation of compassionate care. Medical students, in particular, face greater challenges compared to other professionals (35). In general, the academic culture in medical schools tends to emphasise technical skills and academic achievements, rather than humanistic qualities such as compassion and empathy. This can lead to desensitisation towards the emotional aspects of patient care (43). Additionally, the negative behaviour and attitudes exhibited by senior doctors, as well as compassion fatigue, can weaken the students' instinct for compassion (39). A busy schedule and high workload also reduce students' opportunities for

reflection or self-care, both of which are important for fostering compassion (43).

Limitation

This research has several limitations. First, the literature selection is limited to English-language articles available in certain databases, making potential language bias and source coverage limitations unavoidable. Second, the scoping review approach does not involve a methodological quality assessment of the identified studies, so the results are descriptive and do not indicate effectiveness. Third, the focus of the study on the context of health education limits the generalisation of findings to broader clinical practices. These limitations need to be considered when interpreting the implications of the research for policy and curriculum development.

Conclusion

This scoping review shows that compassionate care is increasingly recognised as an essential component in health education. The integration of compassion values into the curriculum can enhance the interpersonal competencies of future healthcare professionals. Various learning approaches, such as narrative reflection, empathy simulation, and mindfulness-based training, have been used to instill this value. Although the findings are descriptive, the results of this study emphasise the importance of a systematic pedagogical approach in building humane healthcare practices. Further research is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of the compassionate care education model across cultural and professional contexts.

Journalism Ethics considerations

Ethical issues (Including plagiarism, informed consent, misconduct, data fabrication and/ or falsification, double publication and/ or submission, redundancy, etc.) have been completely observed by the authors.

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Availability of data and materials

On request, the corresponding author is required to provide access to the meta-analysis database.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests.

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