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Inspiring Minds – Showcasing Western’s Graduate Research, Scholarship and Creative Activity

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Words Matter

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Recent years have witnessed a shift to place patients at the center of their care as active partners rather than passive recipients. Achieving this goal requires close attention to the use of language. My research analyzes 136 responses from nurses collected for a large international survey that focuses on the term "pain catastrophizing." Pain catastrophizing is a label often used by healthcare providers to categorize patients. These patients are described as helpless and are thought to exaggerate their pain. Ultimately, this label creates barriers to pain management by silencing patients, creating stigma, invalidating patients' experiences, and fostering patient blame. Nurses play a crucial role in promoting patients' strengths and advocating for collaborative care; therefore, it is important to explore how nurses understand and use the term pain catastrophizing to shed light on the impact that language has on patient-centred care and to inform strategies that minimize patient blame and stigma.