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### **The Importance of Therapeutic Communication**

Healthcare Business Today describes the significance of therapeutic communication by stating, “When nurses and other healthcare professionals practice therapeutic communication, they help put patients at ease and create a safer, more comfortable space to give and receive care” (Healthcare Business Today). Every patient that a nurse encounters in the hospital is a stranger in an intimidating environment. Being in an unfamiliar setting may cause the patient to become uneasy and timid when sharing personal information to a complete stranger. To break down this barrier in the nurse-patient relationship, the nurse must develop a professional relationship with their patient and communicate in a therapeutic manner to make the patient feel comfortable and secure in their foreign environment. To do so, the nurse must actively listen to their client and acknowledge the client’s concerns about their stay in the hospital. Restating what the patient has said and clarifying the patient’s problems is crucial when communicating, miscommunication results in insufficient care for the patient. Throughout this paper, two effective ways for therapeutic communication will be addressed along with clear and coherent evidence on why and how these methods are vital for proper communication.

### **Analysis of Therapeutic Techniques**

Clarification in a healthcare environment is one of the most prominent therapeutic techniques. Not only does this aid in avoiding any possible discrepancies, it allows the patient to know that the nurse is making a diligent attempt to properly understand what the patient is trying

to communicate. This may be addressing any alarming verbal or nonverbal cues when clarifying with the patient. Banar explains the importance of unconscious influence when he states, “Therapeutic communication requires maintaining an acute awareness of what is being said as well as any nonverbal cues” (Banar). For example, a nurse is caring for a patient who does not complain of pain but every time the patient lays on their side during a bed bath they wince in pain; it is the nurse’s responsibility to acknowledge the nonverbal cue and address the issue with the patient in order to properly treat and care for the patient. Choosing to ignore the nonverbal cue of the patient will allow the pain to become worse and detrimental to the patient’s health. Therefore, it is important to address all verbal and nonverbal cues to provide efficient care for the patient.

Positive regard or acceptance of the patient is the next eminent therapeutic technique that will be discussed. Accepting and respecting a patient’s cultural background, ethnicity, and/or sexual orientation when providing care is of utmost importance. An article about the importance of the nurse-patient relationship states, “According to Rogers (2003) it is when one person is completely accepting towards another person. This is not just a show of acceptance but it is an attitude that is then demonstrated through behaviour. The patient should be able to feel as if they can freely express their emotions without fear of being rejected by the nurse” (Importance of the). Being fearful of rejection is common amongst patients who have been physically or emotionally abused from authority figures throughout their life. To combat this barrier, the nurse must be understanding and show empathy for the patient. It is the nurse’s job to comprehend the uncomfortable position that the patient is in; the patient must state personal facts with the nurse and open up to a complete stranger. For patients who appear to be unattached from their feelings, the nurse must support their patient and help them identify their feelings. Doing this will create a

safe space for the patient and result in the patient being more transparent with the nurse. When the patient becomes more comfortable with sharing personal information with the nurse, the nurse will be able to conduct a better quality of care for their patient. For example, if a nurse encounters a patient that has different religious beliefs than themselves, the nurse must still provide proper care for that patient. Purposely ignoring the patient's concerns and willfully being negligent because the nurse is unable to keep an open mind about different beliefs is detrimental to the healthcare environment and who they are as a healthcare provider.

### **Reflection**

I think that my strengths in communicative techniques is being able to clarify any inquiries about the patient's condition from a physiological standpoint. Teaching the patient about helpful methods to monitor their condition by themselves and different ways that will help them keep their body healthy for their specific condition is going to be one of my strengths. Enlightening the patient about what they can do to combat the illness and explaining why and how this method will impact their body in a positive way is a strong suit for me. I believe that a future weakness that will be harmful for the relationship between my patient and I will be showing sympathy and false hope towards the patient because as a healthcare professional, you do not truly know what the outcome will be. Saying phrases like "Don't worry" and "It's all going to be okay" when the client appears to be upset is not helpful nor productive for the nurse-patient relationship. In the book, *Fundamentals of Nursing*, it describes false hope by stating, "Using clichés or comforting statements of advice as a means to reassure the client. These responses block the fears, feelings, and other thoughts of the client" (Berman et al.) This creates a barrier in communication because if the nurse tells the client to not worry, the client will now

become hesitant to share their troubles with the nurse. As a healthcare provider, we need our clients to be direct and honest with us for us to fulfill our duties as a nurse.

One technique that I need to reinforce is my communication skills when showing sympathy or giving false hope. It is a technique that I have used my whole life and I now know that it is a technique that is not necessary in a professional setting. Imposing unjustified promises to the patient will only weaken the relationship established by the nurse. To improve my therapeutic communication for this specific technique, I will instead convey empathy and address the fears or concerns of the patient instead of simply telling them that everything will be okay. This will be more educational and beneficial for the patient because listening to the patient and responding thoughtfully is better for the nurse-patient relationship.

Another barrier in effective communication that I struggle with is giving common advice. When it is not related to the overall health of the patient, then common advice is usually unwarranted. Some ways that I can improve on this barrier of communication is only giving advice when it is beneficial to the patient's health. Sticking to my expertise and preparing the patient for quality self-care techniques will be favorable for our professional relationship.

Learning the most effective ways to communicate and learning the barriers of communication has enhanced my therapeutic communication abilities. It has taught me subtle gestures like using touch and humor when appropriate can go a long way for the relationship. It has also taught me crucial factors like addressing nonverbal cues and how open-ended questions allow the patient to open up to you. Utilizing all of these effective ways to communicate will enable me to provide proper care both physically and emotionally; being the patient's backbone in times of distress is what a patient truly needs when put into a difficult situation in an unfamiliar environment.

## Conclusion

Throughout this paper I have discussed positive and negative methods when using therapeutic communication. I have addressed the value of using two particular communicative methods, one being clarification and the other being positive regard. Actively listening to the patient and being able to respond intelligently and thoroughly clarifying the patient's health concerns is one of the key factors when developing a relationship with my patient. This may include an explanation of any medical procedures that the patient has to experience, teaching the patient how to treat their illness after they leave the hospital, or simply addressing the immediate concerns of the patient when they are admitted. I also discussed why accepting a patient with a different cultural background, religion, or sexual orientation is vital for the healthcare environment. In contrast, the techniques discussed that were detrimental to therapeutic communication were giving common advice and displaying false hope for the patient. These are detrimental because they do not educate the patient and they promote false realities that do not enhance the healing process for the patient. Learning why certain therapeutic techniques are beneficial for the nurse-patient relationship enlightened me on what an acceptable connection between the nurse and patient is supposed to be like. The ability to recognize key aspects for therapeutic communication is equally as eminent as knowing all the intramuscular injection sites on the body or being able to diagnose a patient using NANDA terminology. Providing proper care for my patient starts and ends with genuine therapeutic communication techniques.

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