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N101

Communication Paper

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Communication is more than just talking. Therapeutic communication is more than just talking with a therapist. Communication is complex; it involves people, their words, tone, body language, message, attitude, perception, response, and more. Communication is complex because people are complex, and every person has their own communication style. Therapeutic communication is the intentional use of communication to both build and maintain helping relationships with patients and their families. Therapeutic communication is an essential component of nursing as it promotes the development of a helping relationship, which is an integral aspect of the nurse-patient relationship.

To enhance communication, the nurse must provide the proper environment so that the patient feels comfortable enough to express the truth, their feelings, and their concerns. This environment is more than just the room in which the conversation takes place, though a private, quiet environment is always best. Attentive behavior, a caring and non-judgmental attitude, honesty, trust, and empathy are also essential components that encourage a communicative environment. There are many ways in which a nurse can implement various techniques to enhance therapeutic communication and promote a helping relationship. While doing so, the nurse must also consider the effectiveness of his or her communication skills in relation to both patient communication as well as staff communication.

Analysis of Therapeutic Techniques

While there are many useful techniques that enhance therapeutic communication, I find that active listening is the most beneficial. Active listening not only involves actually listening to what the speaker has to say, but also showing both verbal and non-verbal signs that one is truly listening. A good display of active listening involves facial expressions and posture – smile, act interested, look at and lean in toward the speaker, maintain appropriate eye contact, and make

sure one's facial reaction is appropriate for the topic of conversation. Additionally, avoid fidgeting, looking at the clock, and acting disinterested.

Active listening makes someone feel both seen and heard. This is especially important for people who may feel that they are just another patient in the hospital. I am a firm believer that all people deserve to be treated with respect and dignity. I find that active listening is a way in which we can express this while enhancing the nurse-patient relationship. Active listening encourages patients to express their feelings and concerns. These two elements provide considerable insight into what is going on inside their mind and body and will help guide our patient-centered care. This will enhance the nurse-patient relationship, patient safety, and patient satisfaction, as well as the nurse's job satisfaction.

Another important therapeutic communication technique involves simply asking questions to obtain additional information, specifically open-ended questions. While there is a time and place for direct, yes-or-no questions that encourage a more focused conversation, open ended questions are conducive to gaining insightful information both from and about the patient. Open ended questions facilitate interactive discussion and spontaneous, detailed responses. Additionally, this type of questioning encourages patients to further explore their thoughts and feelings, while also demonstrating the nurse is interested in what the patient is feeling and thinking. To obtain more detailed information, the nurse should avoid yes or no questions. Instead, the nurse should ask questions that begin with 'how' or 'what,' while avoiding 'why' questions that can seem judgmental. For example, the nurse can ask, "How do you feel about your upcoming procedure?" or "Could you tell me more about your tobacco usage?" instead of asking, "Are you nervous for your procedure?" or "Do you smoke?". This type of questioning will provide the nurse with more informative patient data. It is essential that the nurse has an

accurate, complete picture of what is going on with the patient so that they can provide the best and safest care.

While a nurse may be well intended, there are some unexpected non-therapeutic communication techniques that are barriers to effective communication. These barriers include stereotyping, offering personal opinions, judging, and giving false assurance. Though it seems that providing assurance could be helpful, giving false assurance is not a technique of therapeutic communication. It is best to avoid cliches, such as “everything will be okay,” “don’t worry, you are in good hands,” or “cheer up.” These comments, while seemingly innocuous, can be detrimental and even shut down patient communication. They can be inaccurate, viewed as minimizing the patient’s feelings, and lead to increased patient anxiety. As nurses, we want to be comforting and reassuring to our patients, but we must keep this barrier in mind and avoid it at all costs so that we may provide the best care.

Reflection

I am a strong proponent of effective communication. We cannot read each other’s minds, no matter how much we would like to or how much we believe we can. Yes, we can evaluate body language and facial expressions, but we cannot know what someone is thinking or feeling unless they tell us. We must ask questions and provide an environment conducive to sharing. As someone with a ‘who’ oriented communication style, I tend to be more emotional and focused on people, their beliefs, and their feelings. I try to be sensitive to other people, while making them feel both seen and heard during communication. I believe that my sensitivity, awareness, perceptiveness, and ability to maintain an open posture and appropriate eye contact are advantageous skills to have for effective communication. However, I realize that I need to be mindful of being emotional, as that could be a weakness in communicating effectively.

When it comes to improving upon my communication skills, I should refrain from offering personal opinions and giving advice. I recognize that I do this in an effort to be helpful, but offering unsolicited advice can be a barrier to communication as it can deny someone their right to have their own opinions or make their own decisions. Additionally, I find myself generating my response while someone else is still talking. This means that I am more concerned about what I want to say as opposed to what I need to hear. Poor listening is a barrier to effective communication, and I intend to improve upon this to better my communication skills.

I recognize that it will be challenging to communicate as a nurse. As stated before, communication is complex and so are people. It will be challenging to communicate effectively with such a diverse and often vulnerable population. I will likely experience language, cognitive, and physical barriers to communication. As a nurse, I realize that time will be a challenge with a lot to do for a lot of patients. I will also likely be part of difficult, awkward, and emotional conversations. These barriers can and must be overcome so that I can provide the most effective and satisfactory patient care. I must set aside my own personal beliefs and focus on promoting a helping relationship with my patients. By utilizing what I have learned, being contentious of the barriers to effective communication, and being purposeful in my communication, I can work around these barriers and be a good nurse who makes a difference and improves a patient's experience throughout my career.

Conclusion

As nurses, we will interact with various personalities, in often less-than-ideal circumstances. If nurses utilize techniques that enhance therapeutic communication, such as active listening, and avoid barriers like giving false assurance, we will be able to promote a helping relationship with our patients and ensure effective communication. Additionally, we

need to be aware of our communicative strengths and weakness, constantly trying to improve upon our communication skills. Our goal as nurses is to provide safe, quality, patient-centered care. Therapeutic communication allows us to better reach that goal. Hence, it is imperative that we learn and utilize effective therapeutic communication techniques.