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Communication Paper

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How are nurses able to provide the best quality of care for their clients? In America today, nurses interact with many different people that hold a variety of identities that differ from their own and must be able to develop nursing care plans that accommodate ways of life that they may not know or understand. Nurses are able to help clients achieve better health outcomes through therapeutic communication, a style of communicating that establishes a mutual acceptance and respect, acknowledging differences between the client and nurse that allows for open communication in order to express their thoughts and emotions that are essential in devising a plan of care that best suits the client's life experience. In order to communicate with clients in a therapeutic manner, nurses need to be attentive to verbal and nonverbal methods of communication, approach them with nonjudgmental attitudes from first interactions, and acknowledge and challenge any implicit biases that they may have towards people that hold identities that differ from their own. It is only when nurses act in these ways that the client feels acceptance and respected that allows them to fully trust their nurse, enabling the nurse to provide their clients with the best quality of care.

### **Analysis of Therapeutic Techniques**

Exhibiting attentive behavior and actively listening to the clients is essential in therapeutic communication. Attentiveness to clients can be displayed by looking at them when they are talking, taking a seat next to the client's bed, leaning in and having an open and relaxed posture. In conversations with the client nurses show attentiveness through active listening by not just hearing the client, but observing how they are communicating, verbally and nonverbally. This helps nurses interpret the experiences of clients to provide better feedback. I chose attentiveness as one of the techniques I wanted to analyze because communication with clients requires nurses to listen attentively, perceive what they

are saying, and interpret what they mean. The interactions with clients must be free of assuming their clients' experience. Even when two clients have the same medical condition, they are going to have their own unique experience of that condition due to their life circumstances (Klaver 2016). A nurse can know every medical condition, but if they cannot notice patterns in their client's communication, the nurse will not understand how the condition is affecting their client's quality of life. Attentive behavior emphasizes that communication with clients is a learning process about the client's life experience, not just the condition and how they are going to help fix it. Attentiveness should be shown throughout the entire nursing process with the client to get the best grasp on the client's experience. During the assessment phase, however, attentiveness is crucial. At this stage, the nurse is getting to know their client and must be able to perceive and interpret what their client is saying both verbally and nonverbally, requiring their full attention. Exhibiting attentive behavior with clients will not only allow for better health outcomes for clients, but it will also open communication, allowing for a better relationship to develop.

Approaching clients with a nonjudgmental attitude is another technique that enhances therapeutic communication and promotes a better nurse-client relationship. Nonjudgmental attitudes towards clients are important to the quality of care because it acknowledges the identities the client holds and allows for the care plan to be developed with their identities in mind. Doing so requires for a nurse to meet the client without preconceptions interfering in their interactions. It is important that nurses and all healthcare professionals recognize any negative attitudes or beliefs that they may hold towards their client's identities and to denounce them. I decided to analyze this because one of the largest roles as a nurse is being an advocate for their clients, which entails respecting every aspect of their client's life. Failing to do so means that the nurse is not competent in providing quality care for their clients. People seek out healthcare intervention at times when they are the most vulnerable. Interacting with clients with a judgmental attitude can make the client feel more vulnerable than they already may feel and hinder open communication about their life experience, reducing their quality of care (Koh 1999). This is detrimental because the life experiences of the client need to be taken into consideration when making nursing care

plans to cater them to how each client lives their life. Taking a nonjudgmental approach enables nurses to ask open questions that allows for deeper insight of the client's life experience. This is most crucial during first impressions, when the nurse-patient relationship is established and can impact the depth of the relationship. If a client feels any judgement from their nurse, it can influence the amount of information they share, hindering their plan of care, and results in a less than optimal health outcome. The nurse does not have to understand the client's life experience but respect the client's experience in order to have effective and therapeutic communication.

One of the largest barriers to therapeutic communication today is implicit biases. These are thoughts and feelings towards others that hold different identities resulting from socialization that affect the way the people interact. One of the largest reasons why implicit biases affect the care that clients receive from their healthcare providers is that they can affect one's interactions may not be consciously aware of. Fitzgerald states "white people receive a better quality of care than Black Americans, Hispanic, Native American, and Asian patients" (2017). This is due to white healthcare providers talking over their patients of color and not asking for their input on decisions regarding their treatment plans. As a result, clients of color feel less respected and feel like their treatment plans are insensitive to their life experiences and culture. This behavior white providers exhibit is even more pronounced when their clients are women of color, especially Black women. This is evident in healthcare outcomes, where Black Americans have higher mortality rates when receiving care for conditions like heart disease, obesity, and hypertension (Fitzgerald 2017). As a white person, I know that I have implicit biases as a result from growing up in White America. The color of my skin grants me privileges that people of color do not experience, and therefore I cannot understand the experiences that people of color go through in America today and opinions they may hold towards our healthcare system.

### **Reflection**

Being able to communicate effectively with clients means to be able to realize what one's strengths and weaknesses are regarding their style of communication. This requires for the provider to

want to improve in areas where they know they are not the strongest in. For myself, active listening to people is one of my strong suits. Before speaking, I take time to perceive what people are saying and observe how they are communicating verbally and nonverbally. I do not always respond right away because sometimes I think it is necessary to remove myself from the situation to best analyze what the person has said to come up with the best response. I also good at focusing the person on what their primary concerns are. Many of my friends say that when I discuss their problems with them, I can get them to identify how they feel and express their feelings better about what they are going through. My best friend who I currently live with says that I am the only person who can get her to open up about how she feels because I get her to focus on what is bothering her at that time. I do this by asking her direct questions and to elaborate upon her feelings. I believe that I am good at making time to listen to others by offering myself. I think it is important that when doing this the focus is not on myself, but the concerns or thoughts that the person I am communicating with is expressing. One area that I know I need to work on is providing false assurance. I have tendency to try to find a positive note in things, and many times this results in me saying that things are going to get better. I know that in nursing, this is not always the case and that I need to learn how to affirm a client's feelings \without telling them that their situation is going to improve. I can learn to improve on this by discussing with fellow nurses how they provide care and empathy for their clients without providing false assurance. This may be a difficult task, but it is necessary in the career. Another area in communication that I can improve on is speaking too fast. Especially when I get nervous, I speak at a quick pace. I need to remind myself that not everyone can hear and more importantly comprehend what I am saying when I speak quickly, especially if they are in a state of vulnerability like clients are in a healthcare setting. I need to remind myself to take a breath when I am speaking and to slow down. This is only going to improve through self-reflection and acknowledging that I do have the tendency to talk fast when I get nervous. I think one of the biggest challenges in the effectively communicating with clients will be confronting implicit biases that I have towards others. I know that as a white person coming from a place of financial and educational privilege, many clients that I interact with will not have had the same experiences that I have had. It is important to continue my

education about racial and cultural backgrounds, socioeconomic status, gender identities, and religion to help emphasize respect throughout my practice. This not only means listening to experiences of others, but reading articles and books written by people that hold different identities, exposing myself to different types of media that don't focus on the white American perspective, and constantly challenging ideas that I have been raised upon. Understanding my privilege is not a one and done experience, but a continuous learning process that I am dedicated to in order to be a better advocate in my personal and professional life and to make a difference as an activist in our society today. I have learned that therapeutic communication is not something that cannot be taught through a textbook but is a skill that is learned through experience and self-reflection. There are many different people that we encounter as healthcare professionals and that we cannot use a one-size fits all approach to effectively communicate with our clients. As healthcare providers, our job is not to understand our clients experience, but to respect their experience and ask for their opinions about their care plan to help them achieve wellness.

### **Conclusion**

To communicate in an effective and therapeutic manner is something that cannot be taught through a simple reading. Effective therapeutic communication is learned through experience and constantly challenging oneself to step outside of their comfort zone. Nurses must pay full attention to the communication style of their client and look for verbal and nonverbal patterns of communication to best interpret the client's feelings and how they want their plan of care to be developed. Nurses must recognize the differences between themselves and their clients and denounce any preconceived notions that they have about clients they encounter. Failing to do so results in the nurse failing to uphold the ethical code that they agree to when they begin their education and results in lesser healthcare outcomes for their clients. It is a nurse's duty to be an advocate for their clients and to take the client's opinions into heavy consideration when developing their plan of care to allow the client to achieve their definition of wellness.

## References

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