

Importance of Communication in Nursing Care

Unspoken thoughts of a patient to a health care professional:

I am a patient. Receiving professional treatment is an uncomfortable experience for me because I do not fully know what is going on. Usually I know more about me than anyone else. It is rare that another person can tell me something about me that I do not already know or understand. Now, however, I find myself in a situation that is an exception to this rule. I believe that because of your authoritative position, your expertise and your accessibility to my health records you know more about me than I know about myself. As a result, when you speak I listen and I probably will remember a lot of what you say.

I am eager to find out as much as I can about myself from you, as I discover more about myself, I feel more secure and comfortable in my position as patient. Not only are your words important to me but how you say these words and what you do while you talk to me are equally important. If you withhold information about me, you make me feel like a child; I feel less secure. If you do things for me without any input from me, or if you take me for granted as you do your duties, I feel powerless.

From: Interpersonal Communication- A handbook for health care professionals. George M. Gazda

- William C. Childers
- Richard P. Walters

The oft-repeated words “customer satisfaction” are as important in the field of health as they are in any other successful venture. It is important for health care personnel to understand the doubts, fears and the anxieties of the patients who come to them for treatment. This empathy is possible only if there is proper communication. Both the physical examination and surgery can become routine for health care

professionals and thus can make many of us blind to the doubts and concerns that are so obvious in the patients' faces. One tends to be pre-occupied with the examination of the patients and neglects their concerns. Answering questions and wearing a reassuring smile can go a long way in improving patient satisfaction. An experienced and devoted nurse or health care professional not only performs the given job but is sensitive to and aware of the patients' other needs. She/he takes time to assuage the patients' fear and help them become more comfortable in the given situation.

The patients usually have several doubts and questions in their minds. For example, after the preliminary exam, the patients are usually advised to have their eyes dilated. The patients wonder why this is necessary. Why is the doctor not giving them an injection or prescribing medication for their affected eyes? Many such questions arise in the minds of the patients. Though they may not ask the questions verbally, their expressions will display their confusion. In this situation the nurse should, in a very polite manner, explain to the patients that their eyes needed to be dilated in order that the doctor could examine them better. The nurse should also tell patients that the dilating drops might irritate their eyes.

Most of the patients at Aravind visit the hospital to have cataract surgery. As part of the pre-operative examination, the tension in the eye is checked. The tonometer, an instrument that the nurse uses to measure this tension, can seem very scary to patients and they might refuse to cooperate. If the nurse explains the procedure her job becomes easier, as the patient will be cooperative.

While walking around the hospital, one normally (choose either "at times" or "normally") sees patients who seem to be lost, who might need a wheelchair, or who need to be physically helped. There are also circumstances in which patients are afraid to ask for help, but the request is evident in their faces. It is very important for the caregiver to sense the patients' fears and doubts and volunteer to help.

For example, a patient admitted for surgery might say, “There’s something that is really bothering me about the surgery and I am scared.” The patient has voiced a real concern, and the nurse should listen attentively and respond sympathetically to his questions. It is equally important to talk in an understanding tone to those who have not voiced their fears but are obviously scared.

Certain situations may arise in which the patient might say, “I have been sitting here for the past 2 hours waiting for a doctor to examine me, while patients who have come after me have already been taken inside. Engaging in this dialogue could lead to negative talk about the staff or decrease patient’s confidence in the hospital. The nurse’s response in this situation must be very polite. She should explain why the other person was taken inside. Patients may be angry about the long wait and demand a reason for the delay. The best approach is that nurses listen to patients’ complaints and either explain the reason or apologize for the delay. The nurses must be very careful to remain calm while they communicate.

Every day the caregivers at Aravind and other institutes encounter situations in which an understanding smile, pleasant manners and a good sense of humour can help a great deal. Good communication, which involves more listening than talking, cannot be over- emphasized. An ability to communicate well orally, through friendly gestures and with a compassionate outlook that makes one sensitive to pain and fear are some of the admirable qualities in a nurse.