

# Nursing: essential knowledge, skills and attitudes



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Nursing: Essential Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes Introduction Nursing is not just a collection of tasks.

To provide safe and effective care to the clients, nurses must integrate knowledge, skills and attitudes to make sound judgement and decisions. This essay describes some of the essential knowledge, skills and attitudes of nursing and discusses why they are essential attributes of a competent nurse. Nursing knowledge and clinical skills These are obvious essentials for nursing practice. Nurses are required to perform many clinical tasks, for instance physical assessments and injections, which require competent clinical skills to ensure safe outcomes for patients. A broad base of nursing knowledge including physiology, pharmacology and nursing theories is needed for effective critical thinking, clinical judgement and decision-making.

Nurses develop expertise in nursing through the acquisition of nursing knowledge and clinical experience (Crisp & Taylor, 2005). Knowledge of legal and ethical issues Knowledge of legal issues are essential because nurses are required to practise in accordance with legislation affecting nursing practice and health care (ANMC, 2006) Failure to respect the legal rights of clients may result in legal or disciplinary actions. Nurses also encounter ethical issues everyday. To deal effectively with them, nurses need to have the ability to identify ethical issues correctly, understand their implications and make ethical decisions (Daly, Speedy & Jackson, 2006). Knowledge about legal and ethical principles is needed to justify nursing practice (Francis, Bowman & Redgrave, 2001). Communication skills Communication is the

sending and receiving of messages via symbols, words, signs, gestures or cues (Peate, 2006).

Communication skills are required for every nursing interaction, assessment and intervention (Jones & Cheek, 2003). They are important diagnostic and therapeutic tools (Francis et al, 2001). Effective communication is essential for the establishment of therapeutic relationships and help to diminish assessment errors, misunderstanding and conflicts, while poor communication can lead to litigation or result in harm to clients (Francis et al). Listening and attending, empathy, information giving and support in the context of a nurse-patient relationship are identified as essential communication skills in nursing (Timmins, 2007). Critical thinking and reflection As the nurses who participated in a study (Jones & Cheek, 2003) overwhelmingly advised, there is no such thing as a typical day for a nurse. Nurses face new situations everyday and it is important that they can adjust their knowledge and skills accordingly.

Critical thinking and reflection are essential skills because they can enhance nurses' ability to solve problems and make sound decisions. Critical thinking skills enable nurses to identify multiple possibilities in clinical situations and alternatives to interventions; weigh the consequences of alternate actions; and make sound judgement and decisions (Brunt, 2005). Through reflection, nurses can examine their practice, explore feelings and reactions and connect new meanings to past experience (Brunt). Reflection can enhance self-awareness, foster professional satisfaction and growth and increase the possibility for change and improvement in nursing practice and therapeutic relationships (Thorne & Hayes, 1997).

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Compassion and respect  
Compassion and respect are essential attitudes for nursing practice. Compassion has been described as the “wounding of the heart” or a “visceral reaction” to the experience of human suffering (Peters, 2006) and is essential for the establishment of good nurse-patient relationship. Patients expect nurses to be compassionate and compassion is one of the main criteria patients evaluate the quality of nursing practice (Graber & Mitcham, 2004). Respect is another essential attitude. Nurses are required to practise “in a way that acknowledges the dignity, culture, values, beliefs and rights of individuals/groups” (ANMC, 2006). To deliver effective and non-discriminatory nursing care to clients, it is essential that nurses recognise and respect diversities in culture, values, beliefs, thinking, opinions and lifestyles (Ervin, 2005), and clients’ right to privacy, confidentiality and dignity.

Conclusion All of the above are important knowledge, skills and attitudes that a nurse should possess. They are like bricks in a foundation. A wall will fall if a brick in its foundation is missing. A professional nurse must integrate these essential knowledge, skills and attitudes to deliver holistic care to the clients. References Australian Nursing & Midwifery Council (ANMC).

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