

Barriers to communication



A Research Paper on " Barriers to Effective Communication in Nursing" By Vivek Shivram Introduction Effective communication is an integral component of a successful nursing professional. While this may not seem a strong statement at first, its importance, its striking truthfulness and its clear presence in a successful career is virtually undeniable. Because male or female, nurses must create an interactive, colorful communication channel for their professional success.

However, the importance of communication is not given adequate attention today. For a variety of reasons, communication in nursing remains overlooked. Owing to its simplicity, nursing professionals have failed to understand the importance of communication.

The four barriers to effective communication

Poor Listening Skills

Gender Differences between nurses and patients

Language Barriers

Physiological barriers: Communication Impairment

These four elements are described below, each being supported by authentic and scholarly research.

Poor Listening Skills:

The problem of poor listening is only because of lack of attention in most cases, but many studies have shown that in a nurse-patient relationship, the problem is much more diverse and serious.

Nurses fail to listen properly due to many reasons. Firstly, nurses have to keep up with the demand of their job all the time - which involves running from one bed to another, and taking care of many patients with individual and unique requirements within short notice. As a consequence, studies

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point out, that nurses fail to "listen" carefully to their patients owing to lack of time - they prefer hearing them out for a formality. Secondly, nurses are afflicted with a disease called "predisposition". Their prejudice on many vital areas causes them to ignore individual and unique patient needs, which automatically leads to a communication breakdown.

Lack of patience among patients arises because of their lack of participation in a conversation, where they have to primarily play the role of a listener.

This leads to irritability and loss of patience. "In each interaction, it was the STAFF who controlled the time, place, participants, structure, purpose, topics and language, as well as the form and style of discourse. There were few opportunities for patients to influence the agenda." 1(Cass, Alan, et al.: Sharing true stories: improving communication between aboriginal patients and healthcare workers, 2002.)

Gender differences between nurses and patients:

The difference in the gender of patients and nurses leads to many awkward and natural difficulties in communication, and magnifies in cases when the patient has sensitive needs to be taken care of. Female patients feel shy in discussing their problems with male nurses, and male patients feel awkward in talking about their problems to female nurses. The gender differences are commonly seen as a problem in nursing all around the world, but are surprisingly overlooked. Studies show that male patients prefer male nurses, and female patients prefer female nurses. Quoting the Open University's article (Vol. 11, No. 3, June 2004, Nursing Management), "Female staff may, for instance, sense that certain masculine kinds of discourse are more "powerful" and "influential" in an organization than "feminine" ways". 2

Language Barriers:

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Not seen by many as a barrier to effective communication, language is one of the most important hindrances in an effective communication network. In the UK, where there is an acute shortage of health care professionals, many nurses are from overseas countries like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, etc.

Owing to a different ethnic background, it becomes a difficult task for patients and nurses to understand each other well. The barrier of language has gained importance recently, and studies have shown language barriers as one of the most important hindrance to effective communication between nurses and patients. In a real life case study, taken from Elizabeth

Higginbotham's article " How to Overcome a Language Barrier"

(Higginbotham, Elizabeth; October 2003), it is seen how a different language leads to a severe communication gap and gains undue importance.

" In one tragic case, the girlfriend of an unconscious patient told paramedics he was " intoxicado." They mistakenly assumed the patient was drunk or had overdosed on drugs. In fact, she was trying to tell them he had been nauseated before collapsing. While the patient was subsequently treated for an overdose, two blood clots that had formed in his brain went undetected and untreated. The patient became a quadriplegic and was awarded a \$71 million settlement, payable over the course of his life, as a result." 3

Physiological Barriers:

Where will be the communication if the patient can't speak Physiological barriers are an important barrier to effective communication between staff and patients in a hospital, and must be given importance. It is extremely crucial for nurses to remember that while attending to patients with a communication problem, they should devise alternate methods to communicate with the patient, and must not in any case, irritate the patient

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by displaying impatience. " A significant number of patients who require nursing care are permanently unable to speak because of physical, developmental or acquired disabilities, such as cerebral palsy or severe brain injury. In addition, some patients are temporarily unable to speak because of intubation or Guillian-Barre Syndrome, for example. Both groups of patients, however, may experience similar levels of anxiety and frustration because of their difficulties in communicating with nurses." 4 (Hemsley, Bronwyn, et al.: Nursing the patient with severe communication impairment).

Conclusion

" Effective communication is widely regarded to be a key determinant of patient satisfaction, compliance and recovery. For this reason communication and communication skills should play an important role in nursing education and practice. However, over the past few decades, concern has grown that nurses may often be ineffective communicator, and that deficiencies exist in terms of communication skills teaching in nursing." 5 (Some problems in nursing education and practice, Chant, Simon, et al. 2002)There are many barriers to effective communication between nurses and patients, and most of them are not taken care of with the seriousness they deserve. We have seen how a language problem can cost someone dearly, and also seen how explicitly the problem of gender difference shows up in the communication process. Even though these problems and barriers are so harmful, they have not been dealt with seriously all this while, despite the fact that they are easily visible around us. However, some important solutions are being introduced today. Interpreters are used to deal with the problem of languages. An Interactive session between nurses and patients is organized every now and then to facilitate a clear and receptive

communication. Nurses are also being encouraged to be more sensitive and caring to their patients. With all these steps being taken, we may observe a great reduction in the gravity of the barriers to effective communication very soon.

References

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