

Importance of critical thinking in nursing practice



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“ Critical Thinking is skilled work. It is not true that we are naturally endowed with the ability to think clearly and logically - without learning how, or without practicing.” (Alfred Mander 1947)

The meaning “ critical thinking” is defined in many different ways most of which are referred to “ the process of observing, collecting, analyzing and interpreting information from different sources” (Crisp & Taylor 2009 pp. 244.). In this essay, the main topics that discuss the ways in which critical thinking enhances the professional practice of the registered nurse are the levels of critical thinking, the critical thinking in decision making and the critical thinking in problem solving and the attitudes that nurses need to be a critical thinkers.

As a nurse there are three different levels of critical thinking - the basic level is the level where the beginner will automatically believe that the experienced will provide them with the correct answers for every problem. The complex level shows that the critical thinker will slightly be more independent with his or her choices they make, also showing some sort of detachment from the more experienced person. The commitment level is the final level where the individual has the ability and the confidence to be able to take on tasks and make their own choices without guidance from an authority. (Crisp & Taylor 2009 pp. 246). These levels are relevant to the topic as they are important to the nurses’ ability to work, which therefore improve their professional practice (Crisp & Taylor 2009 pp. 247). In the basic level the nurse has “ limited experience in critical thinking” (Crisp & Taylor 2009 pp. 246). A new nurse will believe that the more experienced professional will have the right knowledge to solve any problem (Crisp &

Taylor 2009 pp. 246). This is because the individual is in the early stage of development (Crisp & Taylor 2009 pp. 246).

In the complex stage, the individual will become more confident and begin to work and think more independently (Crisp & Taylor 2009 pp. 246).

In the final level of critical thinking the character is completely confident to complete tasks and make their own choices without the need of any assistance (Crisp & Taylor 2009 pp. 247).

These levels show the growth and changes of a nurse and how they become stronger and “ committed critical thinkers” (Crisp & Taylor 2009 p. 247).

Forming a workplace that involves “ Performance expectations” such as having values that are clear to understand by everyone in that work environment (Girard, Linton & Besner 2005) can positively influence the professional practice behaviour in that workplace because the nurses can have the choice of taking part or have their own opinion in the particular matter. (Girard, Linton & Besner 2005). It is important to have professional behaviours in the work place as it allows the nurse to critically think about the way they approach issues and topics when they work, in both practice and patients care. (Girard, Linton & Besner 2005)

In relation to decision making, nurses need to be critical thinkers to be able to deal with problems and sometimes difficult situations “ where a choice determines the course of action” (Crisp & Taylor 2009 p. 248). It is said that in clinical decision making, both reasoning strategies and criteria’s are used by clinical nurses (Taleghani et al. 2009 p. 351). As a nurse they ask why a

decision needs to be made so that the nurse can make the right choices for the patient (Crisp & Taylor 2009 p. 248). The professional practice of a nurse can “ make sound judgments”(Girard et al 2005) or make decisions based upon their knowledge and experience and sharing their critical thinking skills to develop further knowledge in decision making (Girard et al 2005).

“ Critical thinking in nursing has been described as effective problem- solving ability” (Oermann, 1997). During the critical thinking phase, nurses should undergo a complete assessment of the patient in order to analyse and understand what the patient needs. After critical thinking the nurse should then follow this up by problem solving “ that applies evidence based and outcome direct interventions to improve the health of the patient” (Wilgis, 2008). Effective problem solving from a nurse will allow him or her to critically think and be able to perform such tasks again in similar circumstances in the future (Crisp & Taylor 2009 p. 248).

Through knowledge and experience a nurse will be able to think critically about the purpose or principle of problem solving as it is vital for the professional nursing practice (Crisp & Taylor 2009 p. 244). As in some circumstances the patient may not show clear symptoms or other signs to indicate what that patient may require. So as a nurse, it is vital to critically think about other options or ways they could conclude the situation. (Crisp & Taylor 2009 p. 244)

The attitudes of critical thinking are used as a guideline in both decision making and problem solving (Crisp & Taylor 2009 p. 250). These attitudes are important in the sense that the “ problems do exist” (Crisp & Taylor 2009

p. 251). The importance of this is that the nurse is aware of the problems that occur in the workplace. All attitudes of critical thinking can be applied to the professional nursing practice (Crisp & Taylor 2009 p. 251 table 14. 3). This is important as the attitudes can be used as a “ guideline” (Crisp & Taylor 2009 p. 251) for the nurses in a sense of showing them different ways of approaching the problems that could take place. (Crisp & Taylor 2009 p. 251).

As a nurse, it is important to think critically about “ interpreting, evaluation and making judgments” in professional practice (Crisp & Taylor 2009 p. 251).

The significance of this essay was to discuss different ways in which critical thinking can develop and improve the professional practice of the registered nurse. In conclusion, critical thinking plays an essential role in nursing whether it is there for decision making or problem solving, finding the right attitudes to be a critical thinker or learning and growing on the stage of critical thinking as an individual.