Teaching the Soft Skills of Nursing through Reflective Role Play

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Maddie enters her patient’s room with her instructor ready to pass her 0900 medications. Maddie is taking care of two patients this day and has had a busy morning so far. Upon entering the room, she finds her patient sitting in bed, holding her husband’s hand, and crying about the news that her cancer has spread. Maddie proceeds to wash her hands, ask for her patient’s name and birthdate, and administer the medications. She leaves the room without asking about the tears or if there is anything that she can do to help.
Linda is a first semester nursing student who is about to administer her first injection under her clinical instructor’s observation. After prepping the site, she attempts to insert the subcutaneous into the patient’s abdominal tissue only to have the needle bounce off of the skin. To which Linda loudly replies “*#$@*”!
What exactly are the “soft skills” of nursing?

- Communication
- Interpersonal interaction
- Professionalism
- Assertiveness
- Leadership/management
What is the need for effective communication and interpersonal skills in nursing?

- Direct link between patient’s perception of quality care and interpersonal relationship with their nurses (Fosbinder, 1994).
- Formation of a caring relationship based on warmth, empathy, and respect (Ashmore & Banks, 2004).
- Offering of reassurance
- Conveying understanding of patient problems
- Basis for thorough assessment
What is the real picture of nurse-patient interpersonal interaction and communication?

- Lack of effective communication between the nurse and patients, colleagues, or other health care providers
- Patients voice dissatisfaction with ineffective communication with their nurse
- Nurse time spent with patients is often insufficient, unstructured, unhelpful
- Nurses may actively avoid or block communication (Ashmore & Banks, 2004)
- 98% of practicing nurses want more education to help them develop their “soft skills” (Sommer, 2012).
There is a lack of training of certain skills or in specific situations:

- Phone calls to/from family/support systems
- Tearful patient/family
- Actively dying patient
- Angry/violent patient/family
- Phone calls to health care providers
Why is it so difficult to teach these “soft skills”? 

- Theory-practice gap
- Difficult skills to practice realistically
- Students may be:
  - Young/immature
  - Unexperienced
  - Untested
Teaching the Soft Skills of Nursing through Reflective Role-Playing

- Senior students presented realistic 3-5 minute skits to sophomore nursing students in Fundamentals course
- Set in nursing skills lab
- Based on common nurse-patient, nurse-family, or nurse-health care team member interactions
- Incorporated concepts of:
  - Therapeutic communication
  - Interpersonal interaction
  - Active listening
  - Empathy
  - Teamwork
  - Delegation
  - Professionalism
Skit ideas (Instructor)

- First day taking care of a patient
- Grumpy patient
- Patient with poor hygiene and strong body odor
- Student shows up late/unprepared for clinical
- Tearful patient/family member
- Staff member using foul language in nurses’ station
- New graduate nurse on committee
Skit ideas (Students)

- Talkative patient
- HIPAA violation at lunch table
- Agitated patient
- Family members asking many questions
- Confused patient becomes violent/combative
The nurse is caring for an older male patient who has been in the nursing home for rehab. He had been living alone at home until a fall resulted in a left hip fracture. In report, the night shift nurse states that “he is just a grumpy old man.” On entering the room, he yells at you and tells you to get out and leave him alone.
Skit example

The nurse is admitting a patient who lives alone. Upon assessment, the nurse notes that the patient has very poor hygiene, dirty clothing, and a strong body odor. She states that she has difficulty washing herself effectively.
**Senior Grading Rubric**

**Communication/Interpersonal Skills Skit Grading Rubric**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skit was presented in a realistic manner (1 pt)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skit topic was portrayed clearly and accurately (1 pt)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All group members acted in a professional manner (1 pt)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skit was well prepared and practiced (1 pt)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All group members were present and on time (1 pt)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Total: __________

(out of 5 pts)

Evaluator: ____________________________
Soft Skills Pre-Quiz

1. When I am interacting with another person, I am able to comfortably maintain eye contact.
2. I am able to sense the mood and tone of a situation when interacting with another.
3. I am aware of my body language and what it is communicating to others.
4. I am able to read and understand another person’s body language accurately.
5. I avoid or am reluctant to interact with another when sensitive or personal issues arise.
6. I feel comfortable in voicing my disagreement with someone in a position of authority in an appropriate manner.
Pre-Quiz (cont’d)

7. I feel comfortable when entering a patient’s room and introducing myself.
8. When faced with a new situation, I am confident and willing to learn.
9. When something doesn’t go as planned, I am able to adapt and creatively problem solve.
10. I interact well with others and consider myself an effective team player.
11. I value nursing as a profession and try to set a professional example to others.
12. I am well prepared for every learning opportunity including classroom, clinical, and lab experiences.
Weekly Scenario and Debriefing Sessions

- Live performance for morning labs; Videotaped for afternoon labs
- Skits took 1-2 minutes
- Debriefing lasted 4-5 minutes
  - Discussed:
    - Key soft skills observed
    - Body language
    - Right and wrong approaches
    - Clinical examples
Outcomes of this Teaching Innovation

- Positive student comments
  - Sophomore
  - Senior
- Results of post-quiz
References


