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Introduction to Nursing

March 31, 2023

The Art of Being a Nurse

“Do you hear me? Hello? Are you listening? I’ve already told you!” What do these questions mean? Are you listening and paying attention to the person in front of you, and yet are you still responding to this person by saying, “Don’t worry about it; everything is normal?” If so, you did not hear and understand the person. What makes a nurse great isn’t their skill in placing an intravenous catheter, dressing a wound, triaging patients, and charting the perfect medical records; it’s the ones who see, feel, and hear what the person in front of them is saying, presenting, and feeling. How we hear our patients and what we do with that knowledge can change the world for our patients and the healthcare system. Nursing is more than a job, it’s an art, and you must be able to communicate, empathize and advocate for a person you do not know.

Communication is vital in all aspects of human interactions. It sets our species apart, but what we do with it can create or destroy relationships. As nurses, we are placed in a situation of power to tell our patients’ stories to other medical professionals. When patients come to us in their time of need and are at their most vulnerable, they trust that the nurse will listen and help explain their stories to those in their medical team to help everyone involved find answers. But are we listening? When we listen to someone, we must silence ourselves and see the person behind the words. When we truly see and hear the person, we can understand why they are hurting and where they are coming from and work to find an answer to their concerns. But if someone is sitting in front of you, frustrated and angry at the medical profession, how will you help them? The answer is you can’t. A person in a state of anger can’t accept help, and it’s the nurse’s job to find where the disconnect in communication has occurred and repair the communication bridge. The nurse is the voice of mankind.

When a patient hears, “Everything is normal,” this should relieve the patient’s anxieties, but this simple phrase can bring frustration and despair. What is normal in health care? Is it “normal” when the lab results fit a standard, or if nothing can be found to explain a symptom, or is it a fictitious diagnosis? Imagine this: when you walk into your home, you have a table adjacent to the door with a basket sitting on top where you place your keys. This is normal for you, but in someone else’s home, they have hooks next to the door to hang keys, and this is normal for them. Now, if someone were to remove your basket and place a bowl in its place, you would recognize something was not abnormal in your home. However, if someone comes to visit, they may think everything is normal. This change upsets you and is concerning, but a stranger may think it’s not a big deal. In health care, we tell our patients everything is normal; however, they may feel something is wrong and abnormal. Our patients are their bodies; we are simply outsiders in their homes as healthcare professionals. We will never know their bodies as well as they do, and we need to listen to their insights and help them find answers to their problems even if the answers do not fit our standard of practice protocol or our system of derived numerical sets. Heath isn’t as simple as fitting within a set of values created by a laboratory machine. Health is the person in front of you, in their unique physical and mental well-being state. There is no difference between healthy and unhealthy people; they are all people in their unique stages of life. They are a person who needs a nurse to understand them.

Our environment shapes the person into the beings we see in our waiting rooms. As nurses, we interact with people at their workplaces, schools, homes, and communal hospitals. We adapt our choices, behaviors, and emotions from those around us so we may fit in and be liked. In nursing, a patient seeks a nurse to help take care of them, for knowledge, understanding, and comfort when they are vulnerable and scared. We want to be open, caring, and empathize with their pain, suffering, loss of hope, and their joys, as this allows us to grow and become more aware of others’ perspectives. Empathy is a gift some have been given in abundance, and it’s used to create kindness and hope when the world seems devoid of both. The nurse brings understanding and compassion to mankind.

We need to hold the hands of those who are scared, assist those who can’t stand, speak for those who are afraid, and, most importantly, stand by those who need us when they are lost. Nurses are the people’s voice when a patient is unsure what to do and whom to ask. Society has created fear, confusion, and pain throughout the world, and the nurse is present to lead the patients to education, relief, and hope. We don’t need all the answers to be great nurses, but we need to be willing to find them for those who are unable. Society has placed the nurse in a unique situation as the bridge between doctors and patients. We spend the most time with our patients, tending to their needs, feeling their emotions, and making the demands of our jobs, while walking a line between legal obligations and human decency. We need to find a better balance in caring for those in front of us as a person and not a financial number. The nurse is the advocate of those in need.

Nursing has come a long way from its original beginning with Florence Nightingale; however, society seems to be regressing from caring, compassion, and empathy out of fear of legal action. We have lost sight of what it means to help another person in their time of need. A nurse should never be placed in a situation where they are concerned about speed, time, and financial gain. Nursing is about caring for others. We treat every being how we’d hope to be treated: the healthy with preventive medicine, the sick with restorative medicine, and the dying with comfort and dignity. We need to see the people, not the chart. We need to hear what our patients are saying, validate their concerns, and educate and fight for them to find the answers they are seeking. We must remember that one day, we will all need a nurse to listen, understand, and, most importantly, fight for us. Be that nurse.