Literature Review: The Characteristics of a Good Nurse

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Characteristics of a Good Nurse

Nurses are a group of health care professionals who promote health, prevent diseases, and save lives. There are certain characteristics of a nurse which make a nurse a “good nurse” including being knowledgeable in the nurse’s area of practice and demonstrating certain personal qualities, behaviors, or actions. **The focus of this paper is to describe characteristics of a good nurse and provide an example of good nursing in the area in which I practice, the Children’s Operating Room.**

**Knowledge**

Much of the literature claims that a key characteristic of a good nurse is being knowledgeable in nursing (Davis, Hershberger, Ghan & Lin, 1990; Rush & Cook, 2006; Smith & Godfrey, 2002). Knowledge is of great importance, but nurses need to possess specialized knowledge in the area in which they practice in order to develop their clinical practice. Moreover, comprehensive knowledge of the individual’s needs, personality, and situation would be an asset for the nurse caring for the patients. Knowledge should also be shared with colleagues, patients, and the patient’s significant other.

Not only is it important to be knowledgeable in the area in which the nurse works, but the good nurse seeks professional growth by being open to new knowledge and new ideas (Dr. D. Liver, personal communication, November 16, 2009). This professional growth can be achieved by listening, opening the nurse’s eyes and looking more carefully at work, as well as learning from others such as colleagues, other professionals, and patients. New knowledge can also be obtained through continuing education such as reading, attending workshops, conferences, and courses, or by practicing evidence based nursing. When a professional knowledge base and experience are obtained, the nurse will be “good” in that this healthcare professional will be
increasingly competent according to standards of practice and more accountable to the nursing profession.

Personal Qualities

There are many personal qualities that describe a good nurse. Some of the qualities are being caring, compassionate, kind, respectful, and providing safe competent nursing care.

Caring, Compassionate and Respectful

Two extremely important attributes of a good nurse are a “caring nature” (Rush & Cook, 2006) and serving people wholeheartedly (Davis et al., 1990). When caring for patients, the nurse should be compassionate (Davis et al., 1990), kind (Smith & Godfrey, 2002), and show respect for others (Rush & Cook, 2006), as well as recognize the worth, quality, diversity and importance of colleagues and the patients (Resnick, 2002).

Safe Competent Care

In order to commit to the best quality care possible, the good nurse is confident and competent in providing safe care that is skilled in leadership; moreover, the nurse is responsible in professional performance (Davis et al., 1990; Smith & Godfrey, 2002). When performing professional care, the good nurse is committed to following the Code of Ethics, standards of practice, and acts as a role model to the medical profession and the patients (Smith & Godfrey, 2002). Delivery of care is dependent upon the nurse’s personal qualities which will influence behavior in relation to delivery.

Behaviours

Some good nurse behaviours include having strong communication skills, being accessible, and working well within a team.
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Communication

Good communication skills are one of the indicators of how a patient will evaluate the nurse’s care. Stott (2007) states that effective verbal and non-verbal contact with patients, families, and healthcare providers is part of being a good nurse. Some communication practices of a good nurse also include being able to apply nursing knowledge and skills with confidence and demonstrating enthusiasm in the job (Davis et al., 1990). Another important good nurse behaviour that is frequently reported in the literature is positive encounters in nursing care (Resnick, 2002; Stott, 2007; Tomlinson, 2005). Nurses can create positive encounters by being upbeat (Resnick, 2002), gentle and kind (Tomlinson, 2005), and friendly (Stott, 2007).

Being Accessible

Being accessible means helping the patients move forward during times of difficulty in a positive manner by being supportive, taking time to listen, and helping the patients to get through a time of difficulty (Resnick, 2002). According to Tomlinson (2005), “To be a good nurse you need to be there for all your patients, no matter how small their problem because you do not know how hard it has been for each of them to get there” (p. 20). Thus, being a good nurse is being available to help when needed.

Teamwork

Similarly, teamwork is about working together to achieve a common goal. Although Rush and Cook (2006) and Smith and Godfrey (2002) argue that the entire team of medical professionals collaborate with the family members to provide the best quality care for the patient, a nurse’s specific relationship with the patient is also an important and unique contribution within the team (Davis et al., 1990). However, the research on good nurses did not explore the reality that a good nurse must know how to problem solve through critical and reflective thinking.
with other colleagues in making health care decisions. Critical thinking means using knowledge and thinking skills in order to practice, problem solve, and reflect on the clinical decisions that were made. Reflection helps to work through issues, making sense of the experience and allowing for positive changes (Dr. D. Liver, personal communication, October 3, 2009).

**Good Nursing in the Children’s Operating Room**

My area of nursing practice in is the Children’s Operating Room which is considered to be a fast-paced working environment. It is challenging for nurses to work in this area because policy and procedures are not always followed due to time restraints that are placed on the nurses by the physicians. Thus, an example of good nursing in the Children’s Operating Room is defined by the nurses’ ability to follow the policies, adhere to the Code of Ethics, practice according to Standard of Care in this area, be an advocate for the patients, and work together as a team. As the literature suggests, a good nurse in my workplace must be kind and compassionate (Davis, Hershberger, Ghan, & Lin, 1990; Resnick, 2002; Rush & Cook, 2006; Smith & Godfrey, 2002) even when there are reasons not to behave or to feel otherwise. A final characteristic that make a good nurse in the Children’s Operating Room is also respect (Rush & Cook, 2006) for the physicians, patients, and one’s self in adhering to professional standards.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, my idea of characteristics of a “good nurse” is being knowledgeable in the nursing profession and applying the acquired knowledge to nursing practice. Personal qualities of those delivering the care are dependent upon the nurse and that personal quality that will influence behavior in relation to delivery.
References


