Tuesday’s Tidbits

You Are an Advocate For Your Patients

Nurses are supposed to be patient advocates, fighting for their patients’ rights to ensure they get the care they deserve. However, this doesn’t mean that nurses have to be aggressive with others in order to accomplish this. They can and do advocate for their patients in many subtle ways.

The American Nurses Association (ANA) views advocacy as a nurse’s responsibility and promotes advocacy through national patient safety and outcomes improvement initiatives (as cited in Lockhart, 2016). In its Code of Ethics for Nurses, the ANA defines the core values of advocacy as preserving human dignity, patient equality, and freedom from suffering (Lockhart, 2016). These core values are explained below.

- **Preserving Human Dignity** — Every patient has the right to be treated with respect and have an advocate to facilitate communication among caregivers and help navigate the healthcare system (Jacksonville University, n. d.). Lockhart (2016) believes preserving human dignity involves “provision of personal privacy, maintaining Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) guidelines, honoring last wishes, being respectful of religious beliefs and cultural values, being mindful and aware of your patient’s surroundings, and enforcing respectful behavioral expectations from all who enter the care area” (Lockhart, 2016, para. 2). Caring for each patient as you would want a loved one to be cared for should ensure their human dignity is preserved.

Jacksonville University (n. d.) also notes that “cultural and ethnic beliefs can be of great importance to patients and families and must be respected by the nurse . . . especially since they may have an impact on the patient’s physical and emotional well-being and comfort level” (para. 6). The nurse must also be considerate of patient privacy issues and regard patient and family information as confidential (Jacksonville University, n. d.). Patient beliefs and privacy need to be considered and addressed to preserve human dignity.

- **Patient Equality** — Nurses need to ensure that “all patients are treated fairly and receive the same quality and respectful care regardless of race, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, or ability to pay” (Lockhart, 2016, para. 2). The same degree of compassion and professionalism must be afforded to each patient without personal biases influencing this care (Jacksonville University, n. d.).

- **Freedom from Suffering** — According to Lockhart (2016), suffering can be alleviated by giving pain medications, using hospice and palliative care when appropriate, and not denying pain medication to an addicted patient. “Helping to prevent or manage suffering – whether physical, emotional or psychological – is perhaps the most important aspect of care from the patient’s perspective” (Jacksonville University, n. d., para. 10). In other words, all that can be done should be done by the nurse to address the physical, emotional, and/or psychological distress the patient is experiencing.

Being an advocate doesn’t require you to be involved in a formal way with the legislative process or an ethics committee as Lockhart (2016) explains; you do so every moment you provide nursing care and contribute to meeting National Patient Safety Goals (NPSGs). “Making provisions for safe care, looking to prevent healthcare errors, reporting errors when they occur, and utilizing a just culture to address process improvement needs-this is advocacy at its core” (Lockhart, 2016, para. 3). By preserving a patient’s dignity, treating each patient with the same quality of care, and addressing his or her suffering, you are advocating for your patient whether you realize it or not.

References:


Jacksonville University. (n. d.). Nurses must be advocates for their patients. Retrieved from https://www.jacksonvilleu.com/blog/nursing/nurses-advocating-for-patients/