Tips for Communicating with Patients

Nursing education is full of mnemonics, memory tools used to remember information. Maffeo (2006) provides some of the essentials of patient communication using the mnemonic PRAISE which is summarized below. When interacting with patients and their families, this mnemonic may help you remember these important points.

**Person to contact** — Your patients need to know who you are and, most importantly, that you are the person that they and their family should go to if they have questions or need help. Introduce yourself and explain that you are there to care for them and to answer any questions they might have about their care (Maffeo, 2006).

**Resource information** — Many people don’t retain what they hear, especially in stressful situations. Providing patients with printed resource material explaining information you have given them verbally will go a long way in making sure they understand and remember what you tell them. Be sure to make accommodations for patients who have visual needs or require simpler or a foreign language. You need your patients to understand their care and be an active participant. Written materials can help (Maffeo, 2006).

**Assume nothing** — Regardless of how much patients seem to know about their condition or treatment, make sure you explain everything you are doing and what you need them to do. Stress and illness may make them unable to think clearly and process information the way they normally would, so explaining everything will help prevent misunderstanding (Maffeo, 2006).

**Initiate communication** — Talk to your patients and get them to engage with you. Many times patients are afraid, in pain, or depressed, and communication may not be something they want to do. Take the time to stop and ask how they are feeling, if they have any questions, or if there is anything you can do for them; this will let them know that you’re not too busy to care for and listen to them and make them feel more comfortable. For some patients, you may be the only person that takes the time to do this (Maffeo, 2006).

**Stress can be overwhelming** — Stress colors what we hear and how we hear it. Stress and fear may not allow patients to process what you are saying, so repeat and review what you tell them and repeatedly show patients how to perform the tasks on their own. Document all patient training and instruction and their response to your instruction as well (Maffeo, 2006).

**Explain everything** — Describe to your patient everything that is being done, including what to expect and what they’ll feel and experience. This will prepare your patient for what is or will be happening and allow the patient to feel some sense of control (Maffeo, 2006).

The best way to communicate with your patients and their families is the way you would communicate with your mother, father, sister, brother, grandparent, or child if any of them were your patients. The things you’d like them to know about their care are the same things your patients want to know as well. Keeping them well-informed will not only make them a partner in their care, it will make them feel cared for and respected.

Reference