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# COMMUNICATION IN NURSING AND HEALTHCARE

A Guide for Compassionate Practice

IRIS GAULT, JEAN SHAPCOTT, ARMIN LUTHI AND GRAEME REID



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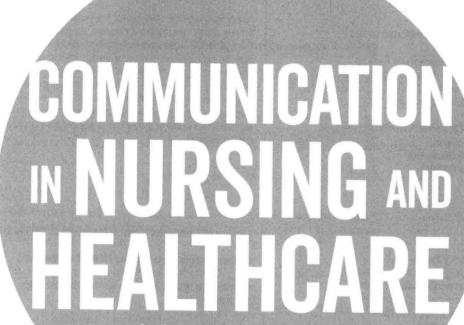


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#### **About the Authors**

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Graeme Reid is a registered mental health nurse and was a mental health nursing student at the Faculty of Health, Social Care and Education at Kingston University and St George's University of London when the writing of this book commenced. Whilst other students contributed, Graeme provided the major component of the student nurse perspective on what is needed in communication skills for healthcare students. He has worked as a staff nurse in acute mental health nursing and is now working as a community psychiatric nurse within an early intervention in psychosis team.

Judith Francois is a registered general nurse and health visitor. She is a Senior Lecturer in the Clinical Leadership and Management team in nursing at the Faculty of Health, Social Care and Education at Kingston University and St George's University of London. She has extensive experience in community healthcare, in nursing education and has worked extensively with a range of families and individuals within the community setting, focusing on improving health. She has also worked with the NHS Leadership Academy on the Mary Seacole programme, and has a special interest in leadership, coaching and widening participation.

#### Introduction

Contemporary healthcare is radically changing in form, structure and expectation. The challenge is to improve health in people with multiple morbidities within a better integrated care environment and to manage a variety of complex situations. The health practitioner is required to communicate to promote health, to enable self-management with service users, to provide support in crisis and to effectively function in multi-agency and disciplinary environments. Contemporary healthcare requires an in-depth understanding of the influences on human behaviour and communicative methods that enable positive change to occur.

This book has been written with the aid of substantial input and advice from students. One of the authors, now qualified, began the process of writing the book whilst still a student nurse. Prior to the commissioning of the book, we asked healthcare students for their thoughts and opinions on what was needed in a book on communication. A focus group of third-year students at Kingston University and St George's University of London provided some 'very real' perspectives on what they felt was needed in a book on communication. However, in particular, students said that it was the 'difficult communication or conversations' in healthcare that really required addressing. Students in the latter stages of their training report difficulty in dealing with complex communication in their practice. Their feedback suggested that communication skills education was often focused on the earlier stages of courses. Nevertheless, they felt that they required more input for those occasions when facing patients with life-threatening/changing conditions, acute psychological distress or in need of assistance in changing problematic health behaviour. Therefore, we hope we have faithfully reflected these issues within the book.

This book is a text on communication, designed for student nurses and midwives to use throughout their three-year training in any field of healthcare practice. It aims to enable students to develop key, evidence-based therapeutic communication skills for today's healthcare settings. The book aims to help students understand the essential elements of compassionate communication, the theoretical underpinning, the techniques and tools to equip them to be competent practitioners. It will encourage students to be thoughtful, mindful and inquiring; capable of compassionate communication and collaborative partnerships with patients. The intention is to guide students from basic communication skills through to a more sophisticated understanding of how to enhance positive behaviour change, to cope with acute distress and negotiate within and across boundaries.

However, crucially the book also emphasises the importance of and provides tools to allow students to look after their own emotional wellbeing. Our view is that the majority of healthcare students commence their education with the intention of being compassionate and collaborative. Where compassion is found to be lacking, it is often the case that those practitioners have become overwhelmed and unable to attend to their own and their patients' emotional needs. Therefore, the book focuses as much on the student as it does on the patient or care group.

Structurally, the book is in three parts, developing in complexity and reflecting the stages of nurse and midwifery education. Part 1 concentrates on values and self-awareness; Part 2 on communication with specific care groups; and Part 3 on issues of importance as students face qualification. The terms 'patient' and 'service user' will be used interchangeably, reflecting the current reality of vocabulary within caring services.

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#### PART 1

#### FUNDAMENTALS OF COMMUNICATION FOR COMPASSIONATE PRACTICE

Part 1 is designed to help students develop a better understanding of themselves within the context of healthcare. It aims to allow them to explore their communicative and collaborative abilities in order to more effectively apply these to their patients. Whilst there is some discussion of 'how to do communication', the emphasis is on examining the factors influencing underlying attitudes towards ourselves and others. This section will refer to patients and clinical scenarios but the focus is on the individual practitioner. It illustrates how theory and contemporary psychological applications can enhance coping mechanisms, communication and collaborative skills for student nurses and midwives.

Chapter 1 looks at understanding the context of communicative and compassionate care. It examines the centrality of communication to collaborative relationships and the values underpinning care. Chapter 2 explores the components of professional communication in nursing and midwifery and begins to introduce the student to an understanding of reflective practice. Chapter 3 looks at the developmental psychological theory of Piaget and Bowlby. These important psychological building blocks help develop an appreciation of the processes that affect our own and others' behaviour and communication patterns. Chapter 4 highlights contemporary health issues and the need to develop more effective forms of health behaviour change methods. Part 1 then concludes with emotional intelligence/competence and mindfulness; acknowledging that it is essential that nurses and midwives look after their own psychological wellbeing, in order to effectively communicate and collaboratively care for patients and service users.



#### The state of the s

### Essential Values for Communication, Compassion and Collaborative Care

Iris Gault, Graeme Reid and Armin Luthi

Objectives

By the end of this chapter, you will have developed an understanding of:

- the importance of communication and the context of failures in compassionate communication and care
- · the ethical values underpinning compassionate communication: respect and preservation of dignity
- the complexity and centrality of the therapeutic relationship.

Don't forget to visit the Values Exchange website at http://sagecomms.vxcommunity.com for extra practice and revision activities.



#### Introduction

Nationally and internationally the requirement for nurses to communicate effectively and ethically is highlighted and documented in essential standards and codes of behaviour. In the United Kingdom, the Nursing and Midwifery Council's standards for pre-registration nursing state:

All nurses must build partnerships and therapeutic relationships through safe, effective and non-discriminatory communication. They must take account of individual differences, capabilities and needs

They must ensure people receive all the information they need in a language and manner that allows them to make informed choices and share decision making. (Nursing and Midwifery Council England, 2010, p. 15)

In this chapter, we argue that in order to achieve the standards expected in the effective delivery of healthcare, it is crucial to fully understand the importance of compassion, apparent failures in compassion, the ethical values underpinning positive communication and the centrality and complexity of communication in therapeutic relationships. It is also necessary to appreciate that a seemingly simple task such as communicating with a patient is actually a complex and skilled process. This chapter unpicks the intricacies of communication and encourages the student to maintain an inquiring approach to practice that might look undemanding at first glance.

#### The importance of communication and remaining compassionate

Will you remain compassionate and caring in your communication?

#### Student story 1.1: Janet

Janet is a first-year student nurse. She is one of the more mature students at 35 but is full of enthusiasm for her career change and considers herself to be a 'people person'. She used to work in a high-powered job in finance and, had she stayed, would certainly have earned more money than she ever will in nursing. However, she became disillusioned with finance, feeling that a lifestyle associated with simply earning money was not for her. Consequently, she has given up a lot to be a student nurse and hopes it will all work out. She is married and has two children who are now half way through secondary school, so this seems a good time to make the change. Her husband and children are supportive of her doing a nursing course. She feels a bit anxious about learning the technical aspects of the job but thinks she is making progress. Janet has just started her first placement on a busy medical ward. She's enjoying the work but notices that because she looks older than the other first years (they are both 19), the patients seem to expect her to be able to provide reassurance in a way that they don't expect from the younger students. In addition, when the practice educator comes round and sees all of the students in a group, the younger students always seem to expect her to answer first when they are asked a question. It's all a bit more difficult than she expected.

She's also very aware that just as she has entered nursing, there is a lot of publicity about poor standards of care. Janet is very determined that she will maintain her own high standards but she recognises that the ward is very busy (it is winter and lots of older people are being admitted) and she can also see that some of the healthcare assistants are cutting corners.

#### Student story 1.2: Jack

Jack is a first-year learning disability student nurse. He had worked as a support worker in learning disabilities prior to commencing his nursing course. Jack is 33; he took quite a while to work out what he wanted to do in life. He started a sociology degree in his 20s but felt it wasn't for him and did not complete the course. He has had a number of jobs in sales but, again, felt that it wasn't for him. A friend worked as a residential social worker in a community facility for people with physical and learning disabilities. Jack started by doing some agency shifts and found that he really enjoyed the work and felt it was more socially meaningful than anything he had done previously.

Along the way, he has acquired a partner and a small child so his decision to enter nurse training is a bit of a short-term sacrifice, but he and his partner have talked it through. He hopes it will lead to a fulfilling long-term career and a good means of supporting his family.

Jack is enjoying the teaching and mixing with other like-minded students on his course. He has been on a couple of placements. These have gone well but have also served to reinforce the idea that there is much to be done to achieve more equality and respect for people with learning disabilities. He is very aware of the tendency for people to ignore the person with a disability and instead address the carer.

Visit the Values Exchange website at http://sagecomms.vxcommunity.com for a broader discussion on this Student story.



Communication may be commonly assumed to be a simple two-way exchange of information. However, it is much more than that and in nursing and midwifery, for much of the time, it is necessary to have communication that demonstrates compassion where one 'must be receptive to another's communication' and 'put him/herself in the other's place' (Reynolds, 2005). Patients and service users can be extremely anxious as to what might lie ahead. The impact of a kind and compassionate approach should never be underestimated, as Patient story 1.1, taken from Patientopinion.org/, demonstrates. The Patient Opinion website has been operational in the UK for over 10 years and provides real-time feedback to healthcare services (patientopinion.org.uk).

#### Patient story 1.1: Gratitude

I honestly can't thank the nurses and doctors at \*\*\*\*\* unit enough for their care and compassion during my visit. I have luckily never had a stay in hospital before this visit so I had been initially apprehensive but the nurses soon eased my worries when I entered the ward. The staff were very attentive, efficient and friendly. Even though I quite suddenly required more treatment than I had initially expected, I felt very reassured by the nurses and doctors throughout the whole experience. If it hadn't been for their professionalism and compassion, I would have felt frightened by the change in the situation. They kept me informed about everything that was going to happen and treated me with exceptional kindness. There was one nurse in particular (I am sorry I can't remember her name) who was with me throughout and was absolutely fantastic, thank you! (www.patientopinion.org.uk/, 2016)