THE EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IN NURSING TRIAGE

*1 Ahmed Nuwaifa Al-Johani, Abdulmajeed Hamoud Aloufi, Raihan Z. Mariwa, Ahmad Ali Al- Omari

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Ministry of Health, King Fahad Hospital

*Corresponding author: Abo.k790@hotmail.com

Received: 15 August 2019, Accepted: 15 November 2019

ABSTRACT

Effective communication is essential in nursing triage to provide effective and immediate interventions in the emergency departments. This paper scrutinizes the role of effective communication in nursing triage. Triage is generally defined as prioritizing or sorting the patients for the care and treatment that is due to shortage of the necessary resources in the Emergency Department. The role of the triage nurses is to evaluate patients’ critical symptoms and collect information about their medical history and presents reasons for visiting the emergency care. Based on the information that they collect, triage nurses make informed decision about the urgency needs. It is from the decision that the triage nurse makes about the urgency of a patient that then the emergency department staff to develop an order. Based on all these, it is evident that effective communication is key in the triage department. Nonetheless, for proper decision making, there has to be effective communication. Hence, the triage nurses must have ability to make quick and informed decision, as well as high level of listening skills to execute their roles effectively. This investigation concludes that the quality of communication between triage nurses and patients has a strong influence on patient outcomes.

Keywords: Nursing Triage, Communication Skills, Emergency Department, Nursing Communication.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

A proper means of sharing essential data regarding patients’ medical condition is a critical requirement of robust medical intervention measures especially in the emergency care department. The information must be conveyed and completed by a trained nurse to ensure that patients receive appropriate attention, with the requisite degree of urgency and in a suitable location. Many benefits have been associated with effective communication including better nursing practices, which, through clinical management prioritizes patients who are in greatest need of attention. According to Ganley and Gloster (2011), emergency nursing practice is often affected by the brevity of interaction between patients and nurses, the stressful situation brought by the lack of control over the number of patients looking for emergency care and limited time to assess the rationale of intervention. Since triage nurses have limited control over the situations in the work environment, they should make best use of the available time through effective communication. Hence, the essence of this inquiry in examining the role of effective communication among the triage nurses.

1.2 Strategies for effective communication

Potter and Parry (1989) defined communication as the "ongoing, dynamic series of events that involve the transmission of information or feelings between two or more people" (pp. 491-492). The idea of triage, for a long time, has been closely tied to the emergency department to minimize the time needed to examine patients and, still, allow for additional time to deliver effective clinical services to patients. Yet, the lack of effective communication in triage nursing can defeat the purpose of triage. Atack, Rankin & Then (2005) concluded that several concepts of triage, such as determination of level of urgency of a case, early patient assessment, documentation and prioritization of the cases depending on the urgency all require effective communication.

In a triage nursing set up, patient’s information is transferred from the triage nurse to the primary nurse through various communication channels, including verbal, nonverbal and/or written (Coiera, 2006). However, for communication to be successful, triage nurses must strive to convey accurate information, which culminates at the immediate medical intervention. Whenever accurate information is passed and received, then communication will be considered to be effective with potential positive results. Subsequently, appropriate medical measures can thus follow. Arora et al. (2005) assert that communication process is fundamental to attain specific health outcomes in all healthcare departments.

Accordingly, Subash et al. (2004) express that effective and accurate communication requires the user to have the knowledge of words and their respective meanings together with the context in which such words can be used. Such knowledge is specific to the healthcare department in the healthcare and entails the conveyance of meaning and actions. Accordingly, triage nurses require knowledge and gestures specific to their area of work. Ganley & Gloster (2011) argue that one of the best ways that a triage nurse can understand the communication in the emergency department is through experience. Experience will make one to be familiar with the method of communication and the setting as commonly used in the set up. As Creswick et al. (2009) stated, the most effective communication contains a clear and organized message presented in a manner familiar to the receiver.
According to Purc-Stephenson & Thrasher (2010) effective communication should be an intentional process – focused at achieving a specific goal. Nevertheless, Arnold and Boggs (2019) indicate that proper interpersonal communication skills should integrate careful listening with an expression of empathy; being compassionate, mindful of the body language, avoiding intrusion, and being transparent to patient. As such, the triage nurses should identify and consider potential barriers against successful transfer of information in order to create an enabling environment for the same.

2.0 FACTORS AFFECTING EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IN TRIAGE NURSING PROCESS

Several researchers such as Foronda, MacWilliams and McArthur (2016) have acknowledged that lack of effective communication in the triage nursing creates a barrier between patients and the healthcare providers. There is a complex system of procedures in the emergency department and effective communication is the only approach that can link up these systems (Creswick, Westbrook & Braithwaite, 2009). Often the process in the emergency department starts with the triage. As Fitz et al. (2010) stated, triage nurses are responsible for the documentation of the significant information and concluding on present symptoms the severity of illness. The information captured by the triage nurse acts as the guideline for both the primary nurse and doctor in determining the diagnosis process. According to Eisenberg et al. (2005), the communication triage barriers are encountered when a triage nurse cannot get patient’s history; forcing them to rely on the patient’s story an information from any staff who has handle a patient with a similar story. Further, Eisenberg et al. (2005) state that triage nurses often overlook patients’ minor symptoms while concentrating on the most pressing complaints of the patients. This concept often arises due to patient load in the emergency department, but unfortunately such negligence later evolves to a worsened patient condition in the future. After the triage process, a patient proceeds to undergo a test to either confirm the diagnosis or make further diagnosis. The first encounter between the patients and the physician can create another barrier if the story does not match. Hence, this reason underscores the great importance of effective communication in triage nursing.

2.1 Perception and collaboration

Several authors have agreed that perceptions and interpretations of the patients’ clinical information by both the triage nurse and the doctor are equally important (Sanclemente-Ansó et al., 2015; Jiali & Ruth, 2010; Hincapie et al., 20016). The triage nurses are considered more observant especially in matters related to collecting and sharing patients’ clinical information as opposed to doctor who are more technically focused. A relevant example is a case study in a research conducted by Eisenberg et al. (2005) involving a tired with poor mental stability. The doctor concluded that it was a lifestyle of the patients and lack of enough sleep. However, on the other hand, the triage nurses concluded that the patient was a drug addict. Such scenario also illuminates the influence of power distance in nursing communication (Sepasi et al., 2016). The hierarchy in clinical setups has an influence on the relationship between the doctor and a nurse is affected by the positions they hold in regards to patient diagnosis. In another study conducted by Creswick et al. (2009), 67.9% of the workers in a named hospital agreed that medication errors can be reduced by frequent talk between doctors and nurses’ communication.
Nonetheless, the studies highlighted above suggest that nurse-doctor relationship have a far-reaching impact on the quality care of the patient and the system.

2.1 Cultural differences

Culture is another barrier to effective communication in nursing triage. Some cultural values dictate what to share and with whom, thus affecting the quality of clinical information shared between patients and healthcare providers (Almutairi, 2015). Furthermore, the culture of a patient may block effective nurse-patient communication because different patients have different perceptions on health and death. Therefore, nurses are often expected to be more sensitive when handling patients from different cultural backgrounds. As Samuels-Kalow et al. (2012) put it, what is acceptable and works for one patient may not work for another. Given the vastness and complexity of cultures, Ulrey & Amason (2001) acknowledge that one cannot possible master all the health beliefs and practices embraced in every culture. Hence, to strike an effective communication, the nurse should check with his patients about their beliefs. Also, important for triage nurses to consider their personal experiences when dealing with cultural differences in communication and how these can lead better outcome.

3.0 EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN NURSING TRIAGE

It is widely evident that nurses’ communication skills are a key to proper medical care and thus require keen attention. Cheung et al. (2010) indicate that a fundamental part of communication is listening. A responsible triage nurse needs to concentrate, focus on details of the information, and mobilize all the sense for the perception of both verbal and nonverbal communications from a patient. By listening, triage nurses can integrate care according to the evolving needs of patients. Apart from listening Cheung et al. (2010) express that personal relationship, marked by compassion and kindness is also other critical features effective communication in triage nursing. Nurses working in the emergency department can develop a good personal relationship with the patients and have ability to make inquiries with kindness. Furthermore, they should give information that scare patients, instead creates a feeling of acceptance, trust and mutual relationship. Andersson, Omberg & Svedlund (2006) link this kind of relationship to only transmission of information but also mental and emotional dynamics found in effective communication.

3.1 Overcoming communication barriers in nursing triage

In triage nursing, primary communication starts between the patient and the triage nurse. The patient needs to give all the information necessary for diagnosis, at the same time the triage nurse also needs to capture all the information for proper diagnosis (McCabe, 2004). Therefore to get maximum information about the patients’ clinical status, the triage nurse must try as much as possible to maintain a low-authority profile at the start of the conversation. However, as the conversation continues, the nurse can apply more directive tone to get maximum and specific information. There are often differences in cultural affiliation, sex, age and occupation between the nurse and the patient. Occasionally, these differences act as barriers to effective communication, therefore, it is significant for the nurse to understand and accept these
differences, perhaps by checking with the patient or his families when in doubt (Andersson et al., 2006).

In addition, Andersson and the collaborates posit that nurses should examine the level of understanding of the patient and they find it necessary, then they can change language, questions and comments. Cheung et al. (2010) supported such idea when they observed that when a nurse uses terminologies which are not understandable to the patient, they can get frightened and think that his problem is more serious than earlier expected. Likewise, certain terminologies can confuse a patient and give incorrect information. Nonetheless Purc-Stephenson & Thrasher (2010) recommend that nurses should share their aims with the patients before starting the conversation with them. Active listening also works in ensuring that effective communication is reached. A triage nurse should concentrate all the senses and thought when a patient speaks because they may not have energy to repeat what they have said. Moreover, the nurse should also be able to tell whether his patients are listening to him.

4.0 CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the broader aspect of effective communication in nursing triage; barriers and strategies for overcoming these barriers in order to provide effective immediate interventions in the emergency departments. Most researchers agree that these dimensions help the healthcare organization, especially the emergency department to obtain better outcomes for the patients. Also, the triage nurses must ensure that there is always effective communication between them and the other healthcare professionals like physicians, doctors and other specialists. Nevertheless, effective communication in triage nursing is very important to the success of the healthcare and outcomes of the patients and there is a direct relationship between effective communication and quality care.

REFERENCES


