

Improving Patient Engagement With Person-Centered Care

They are more than patients; they are people

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Patient. Resident. Client. Person. Does it really matter what we call the individual who nurses take care of? The current literature indicates that it does, particularly when the business case of Value-Based Purchasing, HCAHPS, and the patient experience have become key words in today's healthcare arena. The language we use may not change overnight, however, the intention behind the words must change to recognize the importance of seeing the patient as a whole human being with a rich life story along with including them as partners in their plan of care.

Patient vs. Person

Patient-centered care has become common vernacular in all healthcare settings. In this model, care refers to interactions during visits with the patient, is focused on the management of disease, and is concerned with co-morbidities and progression of the patient's disease process. The relationship between the healthcare professional and the patient is viewed as important; however, the primary focus tends to be on the clinical outcomes and improving satisfaction rates rather than how to enhance the quality of the patient experience. This does not, of course, deny the importance of improving clinical outcomes and satisfaction rates yet the intention behind the patient-centered care appears to be more focused on the clinical outcome.

There is certainly nothing wrong with patient-centered care as it does elicit patient input in developing therapeutic goal; however, making a shift in both language and intention to create a culture and environment where nurses have the opportunity to hear the person's story and personalize their care based on the needs of the patient takes us to gaining an understanding of person-centered care.



The recent healthcare literature uses the words “person-centered care” and “person-focused care” interchangeably.¹⁻⁴ The movement toward person-centered care began as a long-term care model as “an approach to practice established through the formation and fostering of therapeutic relationships between all care providers, patients and others significant to them in their lives. It is underpinned by values of respect for persons, individual right to self-determination, mutual respect and understanding. It is enabled by cultures of empowerment that foster continuous approaches to practice development.”⁴ There is a concern not only about the specific health issues but also how the individual relates to their health-illness continuum. Person-centered care is about knowing the whole person through hearing their story and understanding how they engage in the world. The development of a meaningful therapeutic relationship enhances the experience for the person and also for the healthcare provider.

McCormack et al developed the Person Centered Nursing Framework comprising four constructs: Prerequisites (professional competence, interpersonal skills, knowing self); Care Environment (shared power and decision making, support for innovation and risk-taking); Care Processes (engagement, shared decision making, presence, holistic care); and Person Centered Outcomes (involvement and satisfaction with care, feeling of well-being, creating a therapeutic culture).² This nursing framework can be applicable in every healthcare environment and holds great potential to enhance patient engagement.

Patient Engagement

When patients (people) are included as active co-participants in their plan of care, there is a greater potential that they will be empowered to assume responsibility for managing their own health. The Healthcare Advisory Board's Playbook for Accountable Care and the National Quality Forum's National Health Priorities view patient engagement as central to healthcare transformation and there is increasing research that substantiates how patient engagement increases HCAHPS scores, reduces 30-day readmission rates and increases patient satisfaction.

Two relatively new initiatives that have impacted these affirming clinical outcomes are bedside shift report and shared decision-making. "Bedside shift report has been shown to empower staff, improve patient involvement, and allow for a safe transition of care between providers."⁵ This effective communication method for transferring information creates a strong team approach and includes the patient as an active participant in contributing to and knowing their plan of care. Shared decision-making, a quality measure for accountable care organizations (ACOs), is a "collaborative process in which patients and providers make healthcare decisions together, weighing the medical evidence of various options, and considering the patient's values and preferences."⁶ Three key questions to consider with shared decision-making are: Is the patient informed? Did the patient get the treatment that best matched their goals? Was the patient meaningfully involved in the decision? Shared decision-making survey tools are in process of being integrated into care pathways with the intention of enhancing patient engagement.

Role of the Nurse

What is the role of the nurse? The two-word answer to this question is: nurse engagement. When nurses are engaged with patients by being present-in-the-moment, they will, in turn, engage the person to share their story. The patient knows their story best and can offer insight into their illness when a nurse takes the time to truly listen.

One of the skills a nurse must practice is to become comfortable with silence and to view silence as a form of engagement. It is in the silence that a patient may access a sense of knowing and understanding about their condition. These "ah-ha" moments form a strong nurse-person partnership as a foundation for co-creating a plan of care. The nurse, through being a therapeutic presence, becomes a facilitator for the person's process of self-reflection.

Being a therapeutic presence involves being centered and grounded prior to engagement and also requires that a nurse is not suffering from compassion fatigue and burn out. Self-care is a core value for holistic nursing and is a critical factor not only in nurse engagement but also in role modeling for patients and colleagues.

Remember, there is a direct relationship between nurse engagement and patient engagement, and the principles of holistic nursing (including self-care and being a therapeutic presence) can inform the quality of relationship that will enhance the patient experience.

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