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The Importance of Soft Skills in Healthcare: The Impact of Communication, Empathy, and Teamwork on Doctor-Nurse Interactions

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Abstract

In the healthcare industry, the collaboration of different professionals is essential, and effective communication, empathy, and teamwork are crucial. This study explores the significant impact of soft skills on improving doctor-nurse interactions and their effect on patient care and clinical outcomes. It showcases how clear communication, empathy, and collaborative teamwork can reduce medical errors, improve patient satisfaction, and foster a supportive work environment. The findings emphasize the importance of cultivating these soft skills in order to enhance healthcare delivery and sustain cohesive and efficient healthcare teams. Therefore, the effectiveness of doctor-nurse interactions in healthcare heavily depends on strong communication, empathy, and teamwork skills. The results indicate that nurturing these soft skills is vital for enhancing healthcare delivery and maintaining cohesive and efficient healthcare teams. Hence, the effectiveness of doctor-nurse interactions in healthcare relies significantly on strong communication, empathy, and teamwork skills.

Key Words: *Soft skills, Healthcare, Communication, Empathy, Teamwork, Doctor-nurse interactions, Patient care*

1. Introduction

The increasing importance of healthcare has brought customer satisfaction to the forefront. The use of non-material resources such as "spiritual communion, oral communication, physical contact, and facial expressions" has increased. Material aspects also play a role. Health personnel are crucial in fulfilling patient needs, establishing trust, and delivering high-quality service. Successful health organizations prioritize employee satisfaction and client satisfaction. Along with technological advancements, the structure of healthcare services has changed. The importance of service personnel is increasing, and hospitals and doctors should prioritize patient satisfaction. Respect is fundamental in healthcare, and both parties should make efforts to show mutual respect.

2. Soft Skills in Healthcare

The process of educational or academic professional training clearly gives medical professionals the requisite clinical knowledge and instrumental skills for practice. However, these professionals also require several other capabilities, or soft skills, for success in many different relevant scenarios or contexts, despite lacking the required content, tools, or training. In this regard, given the characteristics of healthcare work and the importance of both work and patient care in this context, professionals' soft skills, such as listening, empathy,

teamwork, compromise, experience, leadership, or communication, are fundamentally important (Dolev et al., 2021) (Bagarotto, 2021).

Healthcare is a multi-disciplinary field that relies on a wide array of professionals. If the healthcare professions do not embody the most basic 'professional human' capabilities, particularly taking into account the importance that both the professions and patients place on technological advances, qualifications, skills, and knowledge, it seems probable that any such positive outcomes will be diminished.

2.1. Definition and Importance

The term 'communication' originated from the Latin word 'communis' which means common and encompassing. It refers to the transfer of information between people. This transfer concerns feelings, ideas, viewpoints, and assumptions and is crucial in ensuring that the sent and received messages are understood. It is crucial for understanding messages and promoting teamwork. The complexity of the healthcare hierarchy affects the communication between doctors and nurses (Campbell et al., 2020).

Effective communication between doctors and nurses results in better healthcare for patients. Effective doctor-nurse teamwork has been shown to affect the interpersonal atmosphere in a healthcare environment and can be used to measure the job satisfaction levels of doctors and nurses. In some ways, doctor-nurse teamwork can affect the overall quality of care received by patients, including the speed of recovery. Effective doctor-nurse teamwork was mutually beneficial to doctors and nurses, institutions, and the system as a whole. For institutions, effective team collaboration can help reduce medical costs, early patient recovery, and improve care efficiency. Importance performance was found in groups or professionals who displayed teamwork characteristics by mutual goal setting, effective communication, interdependence, collaboration, efficient performance, and growth and psychological fulfilment.

3. Communication in Healthcare

To ensure effective healthcare communication, the patient or service user, regardless of the care setting, must be at the centre of healthcare communication to ensure that the best level of care is given (Livieri, G., et al., 2024). The NHS is an extremely large and complex institution, and patients are seen by many different healthcare professionals in a variety of settings such as homes, clinics, and hospitals. These professionals support the patients in getting the diagnosis, treatment, or information they require, and this can be in the form of either written or verbal communication. The key to effective communication is to understand that communication is seen not only as sending and receiving messages but also how patients interpret the message. It is the responsibility of healthcare workers to be clear in their communication and to check understanding so messages are not misunderstood. (Schubbe et al., 2020)

The term "communication" can be difficult to define, but it is a broad concept that includes the skills we use in sending and receiving messages with others, be it one-to-one or in a group or team setting. Communication is an active process that involves an exchange of information, ideas, and thoughts through both verbal and non-verbal means. The importance of communication in healthcare should not be underestimated. Effective communication within the healthcare field is recognized as an essential part of the standard of care and good partnership working. (Marler and Ditton, 2021). The factors that contribute to this, such as good listening, honesty, dignity, and respect, are all part of the core values of any healthcare worker.

The use of technical language within the healthcare team can lead to misunderstandings. Their different understanding leads to language use that is incomprehensible to physicians. Referral letters often lack explicit and well-presented information, leading to frequent complaints and changes requested by consultants. Barriers to effective interprofessional communication include the need for self-protection, perceived lack of knowledge or skills in others, and a tendency to understate or ignore alternatives or risks (Atkins, 2023). These perceptions reflect a hierarchical organization and task structure that hinders prioritizing patient needs. Transforming these relationships requires overcoming obstacles such as the resistance of physician colleagues, the incentivization of

maintaining the status quo, patient demands, interprofessional education challenges, and government regulation (Fox et al., 2023).

4. Empathy in Healthcare

The concept of cognitive empathy involves understanding other people's emotions, which can be measured objectively (Decety, 2020). Neuroscientific studies show that training can lead to structural brain changes that enhance empathy (Decety & Holvoet, 2021) (Shaw et al., 2020). Brain imaging studies also demonstrate activation in emotional processing areas when healthcare trainees observe emotional expressions. However, emotional empathy, which involves connecting with others and understanding their inner lives, is crucial for social understanding. Trait emotional empathy is a general tendency toward empathy, while state emotional empathy is the current level of empathic concern. This type of empathy can be induced through interpersonal interactions and observational research. Empathy is essential for patient-centred care and building trusting relationships. Healthcare providers use empathy to understand the patient's perspective and guide their clinical skills (Tan et al., 2021). However, practicing empathy can be challenging, requiring healthcare providers to empathize with patients' fears and even their fear of death in terminal illness cases.

Although empathy is vitally important in working with clients, nurses with increased levels of empathetic skills also show greater job satisfaction and enhanced levels of personal fulfilment in their relationships with patients, fellow workers, and themselves. Such employees report fewer cases of burnout. Sensitivity to patients and the ability to communicate empathy are also essential for successfully connecting with patients and families in challenging situations. Nurses with high levels of empathy experience greater job satisfaction, fulfilment in relationships, and fewer cases of burnout. Being sensitive to patients and showing empathy is crucial for connecting with them and supporting healthcare colleagues. Empathy from a nursing perspective is important in achieving trust and promoting patient adherence, but can also help to reduce the patient's level of anxiety. Empathy influences the sense of caring, respect, and attachment involved in the nurse-patient relationship. Feelings of empathy and understanding in the nurse-patient relationship are key to patients receiving good psycho-emotional care (Moudatsou et al., 2020).

In medical education, considerable importance is attached to the development of empathetic qualities. Psychologists in medical education and at medical training institutions work with students to teach them to better understand their patients and to empathize more. Research supports such efforts: empathy declines as medical education progresses, but changes in educational programs may have an effect.

Medical professionals' traits have an impact on the quality of their work. The importance of empathy in the development of a good doctor-patient relationship, and hence better health outcomes, has been well documented. Empathetic medicine encourages trust and confidence in the clinician, making patients feel that their concerns are understood and taken seriously.

5. Teamwork in Healthcare

Collaboration involves a distinct, dynamic perspective and is the result of the combined skills and teamwork of different healthcare professionals. These individuals come together to work effectively under pressure and changing conditions. This concept refers to cross-functional coordination and cooperation in managing healthcare tasks. Teamwork generates innovative solutions through rich interactions in conditions of flow. (Efthymiou, I.-P., 2024). Team actors become creative and unique through their participation in healthcare, focusing on a common goal. This concept should refer to a specific style of cross-functional coordination and cooperation and to the way of managing healthcare tasks around the optimal needs through the interaction among various professionals who deliver patient care services. Teamwork can generate productive and innovative solutions through interactions that are rich and carried out effectively and efficiently in conditions of flow. (van and Davis, 2022). For team actors, it is no longer a matter of being good individually; what distinguishes them is the capacity to become creative, innovative, and unique through participation in healthcare

by taking on roles and describing the team using organizational entities focused on a common goal (Wei et al., 2020).

All healthcare professionals are constantly engaged in different types of teamwork, whether with horizontal or vertically structured multidisciplinary teams. In fact, given the nature of the hospital setting and the unpredictability of patients' clinical status, all healthcare activities and processes are considered to be interdependent to influence patient outcomes. It is essential to ensure that the team is cooperating diligently to provide care. The relevance of a comprehensive approach to team communication in healthcare can be explained by the complex and unpredictable situations encountered in these settings. Effective communication is no longer seen as an elective satellite around healthcare; rather, it should be reinstated to become the prevalent mode of operation. Team members should work together efficiently and cohesively, demonstrating commitment to common goals by sharing information and conferring on decisions to enhance the quality and safety of patient care. (Wei, H., 2022)

5.1. Collaboration and Interprofessional Teams

Team members have specific roles and responsibilities; by and large, they also have common goals and are all working towards the same end. Without teamwork, which means engaging, listening, and advice, both morale and motivation can drop. A lack of teamwork is immediately audible. What then becomes very apparent is an absence of background noise, the normal hum of staff members busily working together. Also, when you have a busy, cluttered environment that isn't filled with staff interacting, the prevailing atmosphere can be toxic. Task confusion and frustration can follow very soon after. Collaborative interprofessional teams produce better, safer, higher-quality care. (Wei, 2022). They are more efficient and contribute to better teamwork. Interprofessional education, particularly for students and junior doctors, increases collaborative practices and improves health professionals' attitudes towards shared learning and multidisciplinary teamwork. This will only happen if good, effective communication is the norm rather than the exception.

Succinctly put, medicine is a team sport. This very fundamental notion is often missed by both society and individual clinicians. It has long been apparent that the solo practitioner is a thing of the past. What is now becoming clear is that the days of standalone clinicians, let alone those of non-interacting teams, are numbered. Relying on star individuals is often not enough. Indeed, at times it may well be to the detriment of care. The culture within healthcare has also changed to prescribe collaborative care via multidisciplinary teams (Brackett et al., 2022). As indicated earlier, such teams can include not only physicians and nurses but also a variety of other supporting professionals as well as the patient.

6. Doctor-Nurse Interactions

We define doctor-nurse collaboration as the mutual effort of doctors and nurses to establish a more efficient, effective, and professional health service process (AL et al., 2023).

Though many studies with a focus on interdisciplinary collaboration or communication use the term "collaboration" to refer to doctor-nurse communication, it is worth noting that collaboration broadly refers to an interaction between or among professionals in a clinical setting, while communication could mean instructions to a patient, explanations to the patient's kin, or any other instance of dialogue between professionals.

Importance and Dynamics

Moreover, the lack of soft skills forced many health professions to introduce and develop training programs for empowering these skills, as it is already a requirement of most health education councils and international organizations. The existence of diverging professional interests, the lack of recognition, equality and equity in roles, and the different ways of analyzing and solving problems, demotivate professionals and give rise, within the team, to the existence of opinion leaders and notorious figures.

Work in this clinical environment can be assimilated into a theatre play, where backstage is a permanent movement and euphoria of action, to provide a good play performance (representation). For actors, they have to work together in the smallest and most facilitative of contexts, they have to be very empathetic, closely interlaced, united, synchronized in movement and effort, and even goals. These connections are directly associated with patient health and treatment outcomes (McNulty & Politis, 2023). However, work situations are not consolidated with this unity. Consequently, professional disunity is manifested, undermining the quality of service, creating errors and mortalities, and lawsuits. (Efthymiou, I.-P., 2024) Health professionals involved in direct patient care should possess a variety of competencies, including specialization in clinical strategies and competencies, communication, professional skills, and emotional intelligence.

In the majority of communication models, specific verbal and nonverbal skills stand out: active listening, empathy, feedback, closeness, clarity, amplitude, genuineness, control, and efficiency. In healthcare, communication brings the patient closer to a faster and safer healing process, provides hope and psychological support, clear and useful information on the disease, and guarantees health professionals' performance, conviction, and confidence, thus enhancing co-creation and co-responsibility in recovery, forming an empathic, robust, and solidly united clinical team. Successful teamwork is evident, especially in crises, and investors' trust gains confirmatory judgment and consequent notoriety.

Empathy, communication, and teamwork are positive personality traits and social skills that are capable of impacting human behaviour in all interactional contexts, and, consequently, in the work environment. In the often stressful stage of the healthcare setting, these skills lead to everyone's benefit: in providing health services, receiving care, and better job satisfaction. The plurality and indispensability of these skills in the clinical setting lead to the diversity and origin of the communication models developed. These were generated from physics, math, social sciences, or natural sciences and are intertwined in the countless jobs in this area of high emotional involvement.

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