

Patient-Centered Care Equals Good Customer Service: Robin Ortiz-Young



New nurses are encouraged to learn how to multi-task work; that is great advice. And the one place a new nurse needs to refrain from multi-tasking is during an interaction with a patient. Being fully present with a patient means an increased ability to truly listen to what a patient says, rather than what a nurse thinks he or she has heard. When listening is compromised, customer service suffers; meaning your patient's needs are subordinated and the opportunity to make mistakes increase. Being a good listener takes some practice in a fast-paced (multi-tasking) clinical setting. Here are seven recommendations to help you slow-down and deliver patient-centered care.

- 1. Make it a top priority to focus on listening to your patient:** get into the habit of listening to each of your patients. While there are always multiple tasks to complete when making patient rounds, slow down or stop when your patient asks you a question, and allow yourself to consciously listen to what your patient says in order to deliver an appropriate response.
- 2. Repeat back the response:** to ensure that you heard and understood your patient correctly, repeat back the response and follow-up with, "Let me make sure I heard you correctly", then paraphrase what you heard your patient say. (a terrific way to decrease mistakes!)
- 3. Avoid minimizing your patient's symptoms:** when patients say they are experiencing symptoms that don't match the particular protocol of a drug or procedure, listen to their concerns without minimizing them. Many times, a one-size protocol doesn't fit all; each patient's symptoms are real and need to be addressed, no matter what the protocol says.
- 4. Listening means tailoring your response to your patient's needs:** inquire about your patient's level of pain; if your patient has been in pain, find out if the pain meds are working. If a patient complains of being in pain, even though it may not be time for the next dosage of pain medication, take the time to find out if there is something to give this patient to alleviate discomfort.
- 5. Don't talk your patient out of their feelings:** if your patient says they are scared and anxious, it is best to acknowledge their feelings, with a simple, "I know this feels scary to you." That validation can be very comforting to an anxious patient.
- 6. Demonstrate care beyond the use of words:** as a gesture of your care and concern, keep your body language accessible, including your facial expressions. It is important to be mindful of culturally appropriate show of concern in order to maintain trust and respect within the relationship. Gestures of good patient care can be very basic, including giving your patient a glass of water, changing the bed and helping the patient take a shower.
- 7. Speak slowly and clearly:** slowing down includes speaking slowly and clearly when addressing your patients. This gesture increases the odds that your patient will be able to understand what you are saying; in particular, this is important with

elderly patients and patients who speak a different language than you. Speak slowly and clearly and use language that your patient will understand. This approach will not only help with comprehension, but will also lower the frustration level for you and your patient, since you may be less likely to have to keep repeating yourself.

8. Clear expectations: let your patient know what can do within a given time frame in order to set up realistic expectations. And, let your patient know when you will be coming back. Authentic, clear communication from nurse to patient is helpful to patients who are feeling vulnerable and scared.

Making a commitment to deliver patient-centered care starts with listening to your patient and seeing each of your patients as unique individuals. When you listen and respond to a patient's needs, you are truly delivering good customer service.

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