

Professionalism: Crucial to Establishing Credibility with Colleagues and Patients

Professionalism is an important expectation of being a nurse. Elements of professionalism include speech, dress, behavior and actions. Here's a more in-depth explanation of these elements and why they are important for a nurse to follow.

1. Speech:

Elements of professional speech:

- Use language that others are able to comprehend; don't assume that all of your team members and patients understand the acronyms and expressions you use with ease. Always err on the side of clear communication.
- Be mindful when communicating with other colleagues: if you are in conversation with a team member who is a friend and with whom you have an easy rapport, your speech is going to reflect that level of comfort; however, with colleagues who you don't know well, adjust your speech to help ensure comprehension.
- Patients: it is best to always slow down and offer a clear explanation of what you are doing with all of your patients; that is their expectation of you as a nurse; the benefit is easier rapport and increased credibility.
- When communicating with patients and colleagues whose native language is different than yours, it is important to choose words that they will understand. Once again, making assumptions that others should understand you is a set-up for confusion and alienation. Pay attention to the body language and facial expressions of others; if you believe that you aren't being understood, then simplify your language. The use of analogies is often very effective in aiding comprehension.

2. Dress:

Elements of professional dress:

- For many nurses, the days are long-gone when it was customary to wear a crisp white uniform, yet choice of clothing needs to be considered carefully when working on the floor; your choice of dress is a demonstration of respect toward your patients. Although dress codes exist, they may not always be enforced. Whether or not a dress code is enforced, appropriate dress is part of your role as a professional.
- When making choices about what to wear, place modesty as an important consideration; hospitals and medical centers are not environments to express a lot of fashion creativity.
- Just say 'no' to bare midriffs and very short skirts: while a young female nurse may feel that showing some skin is not offensive, her patients may be put-off and offended by this type of dress. Since nurses care for patients from all over the world—some of whom may have very traditional attitudes about dress, making a conscious decision to respect those attitudes and values is part of a nurse's responsibility; if your patient isn't comfortable looking at you, then your credibility could suffer and your ability to build rapport diminished.

3. Behavior:

Elements of professional behavior:

- Temper, temper, temper—means learn to manage your temper, if this is an issue for you: while you may want to scream at a colleague or a patient, it is best to refrain from outbursts; unfortunately, sometimes one outburst can become a pattern of communication when feeling angry; that is something to avoid.
- Always think before you say something that can lead to an argument accompanied by yelling and screaming. I am not suggesting repressing your anger is the answer, but suppressing a temper tantrum is definitely a good idea. If you are angry with a colleague, try not to let those feelings build up, so temper erupt in front of patients and other staff. Find the appropriate time and place to express your feelings clearly.

4. Actions:

Elements of professional actions:

- Think team: indeed every team member is an individual with needs and desires and when you work on a busy floor, it's always important to consider the needs of the team as well as your own. Jumping in to help out another team member without being asked and other thoughtful, accommodating gestures are signs of a healthy team environment.

Practicing professionalism may be easy for some nurses to adopt and an acquired taste for others. No matter if it is easy—or not so easy, adopting the elements of professionalism is a sign of maturity that both colleagues and patients will appreciate and respect.

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