Therapeutic Communication in Health Care

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Abstract
Communication is a daily social feature and skill which in the narrowest sense is the transmission of messages from the sender to the recipient. It is an interactive process of exchange of thoughts, emotions and other messages which inevitably occur whenever there is an interaction between two or more persons. The overall content of the work and action of nurses in society and health care system depends largely on the performance of communication between nurses and their close and wider social environment. Therapeutic communication is a process in which the nurse consciously influences on the patient or helps them in better understanding through verbal and nonverbal communication, while encouraging patients to express their feelings and ideas, which is an important prerequisite for the realization of relation of mutual acceptance and respect. The ultimate goal of therapeutic communication is to achieve a particular therapeutic effect (helping through communication). This type of communication relation influences as a separate factor in the process of health care and may have a beneficial, therapeutic effect, anti-therapeutic or neutral communication process when there is no therapeutic influence on the process of care and treatment. Effectively achieved therapeutic communication is one of the professional imperatives of the modern nursing and health care, since it helps to alleviate negative emotional states in patients, to solve health problems and to make plans for activities that contribute to improving health condition.

Keywords
Therapeutic Communication; Nurse; Listening; Support; Feedback

Introduction
Communication is a daily social feature and skill which in the narrowest sense is the transmission of messages from the sender to the recipient. This is an interactive process of exchange of thoughts, emotions and other messages which inevitably occur whenever there is an interaction between two or more persons [1]. The essence and importance of communication picturesquely is explained by British communicologist, Hargie, defining that communication is a dynamic and complex process in which people send and receive verbal and non-verbal messages in order to understand and to be understood [2].

The process of communication has various purposes or roles: receiving and providing information, problem solving, decision making, meeting the needs for affiliation, pleasure, escape from other activities, rest and control over other people [1]. Modern health care is more than well-intentioned and technically professional provision of health services and patient care. The
Therapeutic communication is a process in which communication in health care involves providing responsible and caring interpersonal relation between nurses and users of health care, successful cooperation with other nurses and members of healthcare team, achieving opportunities of quality public presentation of status and social roles of nurses. Realization of all these social roles and expectations depends largely on the performance of communication between nurses and their close and wider social environment [3]. Communication is particularly important segment of team management - in addition to organizational and management skills, logical reasoning ability, reasoning and problem solving, nurse necessarily has to possess the skill of communication with other members of the health care team [4].

All these facts clearly indicate that communication as a social skill inevitably has become one of the needs of a modern and humanistically oriented nursing, because communication means understanding, appreciation and belief in the importance, value, uniqueness, goodness and power of other people, as well as their ability and right to self-determination [5]. Communication skills are invaluable in the health industry, since communication is the basis of any mutual relations, but also due to the fact that communication wins the trust of patients and provides better relationship with other health professionals, producing better results of professional work and thus affecting the final success and quality of provided health services [6].

Communication skill is one of the basic preconditions for the possibility to provide safe and effective health care. In the process of communication, health care involves providing responsible and caring interpersonal relationships that are based on self-awareness of health professional, and another person who is entrusted to us, that is, user of health care. Therefore, the realization of effective and meaningful communication should be a professional challenge in daily work of nurses. Knowledge of communication skills largely determines the level of quality of the resulting relationship with the patient, but also the degree and form of active participation of the patient in the process of health care [5].

**Definition of the Concept of Therapeutic Communication in Health Care**

Therapeutic communication is a process in which the nurse consciously influences the patient or helps the patient in better understanding through verbal and non-verbal communication. In practical terms, this type of communication in health care means the use of certain strategies that encourage the patient to express feelings and ideas [2]. From the psychological point of view, therapeutic communication is aimed at establishing a relation of trust and mutual cooperation between nurses and users of health care. Cooperative relation between nurses and patients is a necessary basis for the realization of all activities aimed at increasing the quality of life, maintenance of health or treating health problems of the user. For this reason, this type of communication is also known in the literature as communication of feeling, support, understanding, compassion [5]. And perhaps such a determination of therapeutic communication reveals the real reason why in nursing practice there are a lot of nurses who have difficulties in achieving a therapeutic effect by means of communication. The nurse must be humane by character and work, mind and soul, while a formal education brings to nurses only professional title, but not moral capacities for humanity, empathy and care for others [7].

On the other hand, there are authors who believe that therapeutic communication is primarily a skill and technique of informing, with health-educational influence and motivation of individuals, institutions and the public on health issues of common interest. The scope of health communication, according to these authors, includes the prevention of diseases, health promotion, health policy and health care management, as well as improving the quality of life and health of individuals within the community [8].

Regardless of some degree of diversity in communicological, psychological and social determinations of therapeutic communication as a form of humane communication, most authors agree on the fact that therapeutic communication is a form of communication that is ultimately aimed to achieve the particular therapeutic effect (assisting through communication) [9]. Due to circumstances of the process and the relationships in it, roles of health care users and nurses in the communication process are assumed to be opposite, but complementary: one side asks for help, and the other can provide it [5]. Therapeutic communication as a separate factor in the health care process can have a beneficial, healing effect and be in function of the treatment, and if not, then it has adverse effects and it is known as an anti-therapeutic process. However, the actual communication with the user of health care can be neutral when there is no therapeutic effect or achieved results in the process of health care.
Effectively achieved therapeutic communication helps to alleviate negative emotional states of health care users, to solve health problems and to make plans for activities that contribute to improving health condition [5].

Realization of Therapeutic Communication between Nurses and Users of Health Care

At its core, health care as a medical and humanistic discipline rests on care for a sick person, which gives a clear picture of the deep moral grounding of nursing as a profession. Protection of patients is one of the most important tasks of nurses in practice, and it has particular importance and moral - ethical value if the nurse takes care of users who can not independently make decisions regarding their health, exercise of fundamental human rights and life as a whole [10]. Due to circumstances of the process and the relationships in it, roles of health care users and nurses in the communication process are assumed to be opposite, but complementary: one side asks for help, and the other can provide [5]. Therapeutic communication as a separate factor in the health care process can have a beneficial, healing effect and be in function of the treatment, and if not, then it has adverse effects and it is known as an anti-therapeutic process. However, the actual communication with the user of health care can be neutral when there is no therapeutic effect or achieved results in the process of health care.

Health care is applied scientific discipline which along their own findings, uses scientific knowledge from complementary humanistic, natural and social sciences. Medical ethics as a science of morality and moral norms is essential for all areas of health operations, and therefore for health care. Many scholars working in this field have tried to define the basic moral questions that define ethically nursing as a profession. These questions are primarily related to:

- decision that the patient’s well-being is a priority, regardless of the circumstances in which the nurse takes care of them;
- assessment of personal own openness towards people, acceptance of their diversities and existence of potential for tolerance and empathically based relation with health care users;
- personal and moral characteristics and attitudes and their subjective importance, influence and value [1, 11].

Adequate moral attitude towards personal profession is a necessary precondition for the effective exercise of therapeutic communication. When a nurse has desirable moral and personal qualities that are needed to serve one of the socially most responsible professions, realization of therapeutic communication will not be a problem for the nurse, but will become a source of satisfaction in the performance of professional activities [5].

In addition to the conscious level, communication between nurses and users who have been entrusted to them takes place at a deep, unconscious level, and it is defined by the specific skills of the nurse, such as:

- personal potential for empathy and sympathy, that is, the nurse’s ability to understand and share emotions of others, with a positive affection for that person;
- availability in the process of taking care - being available to the patient to the extent that their needs require, having enough time for them;
- ability to build trust, achievement of a certain degree of familiarity and provision of the patient’s experience of personal security;
- ability to generate the active co-operation with the user in the process of health care - to avoid creating a relationship of the patient’s dependence on the nurse and striving to the patient’s independence;
- professionalism - nurses should not allow that their personal problems affect the relationship with the patient, but they must act in accordance with professional and scientific principles of their profession and to comply with the prescribed terms and obligations, respect the rights
of others, have good manners, control their reactions, rationally criticize or admire;

- individual approach in the process of nursing the patient, because every person has a right to their own specialty;

- personal potential for the formation of positive existential position, whose principle is: I’m fine, you’re fine;

- sense of ethics in the work - nurses must be directed exclusively to the well-being of users;

- communication skills: the user should not receive partial, contaminated, labeling, sarcastic, negative, comparative, accusatory, threatening or blackmailing messages in the communication process, because it contradicts the basic moral values of nursing as a profession and insults and threatens the user’s personality;

- skill to satisfy the specific needs of users through the process of communication, such as the need for stimulation, for contact, belonging and affection, for recognition, for security, for structuring and spending time, for power, freedom and self-actualization;

- training to identify problems that impede, hinder or prevent the realization of the communication process - contradiction, criticizing, moralizing, ridiculing and embarrassing, threatening [12].

Modern nursing science places communication skills among the basic potentials for ensuring work efficiency [13]. Today, therapeutic communication represents a strategy for achieving successful nursing and health care, as evidenced by numerous studies dealing with this topic. The main goal of these researches is the improvement of communication techniques that nurses use in their everyday work with patients [13, 14].

Nursing science recognizes communication as a form of therapeutic intervention, especially among moribund patients in palliative care facilities and oncology hospital units [14]. Now a days, adjustment of the communication mode to the patient’s needs and possibilities is an integral part of the continuous nursing care in intensive care units [15]. Related to this, the scientists came to the conclusion that some nursing interventions may optimize therapeutic communication, as:

- systematic assessment of patients’ communication;

- education of nurses in augmentative and alternative communication;

- using communication tools when possible and

- securing time, continuity, empathy and patience in nursing care [15].

Recognizing the importance of therapeutic communication has led to the development of numerous innovative communication techniques in the last decade, and certainly one of the most interesting is nurse - patient communication and tele-nursing [16]. However, common to all these studies is that active listening continues to emerge as the most important component of all techniques for achieving therapeutic communication in nursing and health care [14, 15].

**Therapeutic Communication in Health-Educational Work**

Implementation of health education is an obligation for all health professionals, and as well a health-pedagogic discipline, health education is an integral part of health care [10]. A holistic approach in the nursing process is part of the doctrine of modern health care and the only possible way to implement the health care process as a scientifically based working method in the profession of nursing. The fact that nursing as a discipline does not rely solely on the medical knowledge that makes its base, but also to other humanities - pedagogy, andragogy, psychology, and health promotion, qualified the nurses as professionals for the planning and implementation health-educational interventions [17].

The importance of therapeutic communication in the health educational work can be seen only if one takes into account the basic objectives of the implementation of these interventions. These objectives are related primarily to the active participation of patients in the healing process (taking some responsibility for their own health and reducing the risk of possible complications) and the provision of adequate information and training to users of health care when it comes to the health professional [5, 6]. One of the basic and necessary preconditions for successful implementation of health education interventions with users of health care is to establish positive communication
in the nurse - patient - family relation. Establishing good cooperation in this relation results in the achievement of the desirable effects of communication, in particular by creating a sense of trust among users and/or people close to them, their adequate level of knowledge and improving interpersonal relationships [6].

Active participation of health care users in decisions about their own treatment is not only of great importance for the development of the subjective feeling of the user control over their own health, but also has a direct effect on improving the flow of healing. Contemporary scientific approaches in health psychology emphasize the importance of successful communication and cooperation between health professionals and patients during medical treatment, offering a number of psychological techniques to improve overall awareness of patients and communication with health care providers during the process of health care, which is in most cases a very useful therapeutic procedure that indirectly influences the performance of the final outcome of the treatment [2].

The Forms and Stages of Achieving Therapeutic Communication

Therapeutic communication involves a wide range of different types of communication with the user of health care in the treatment process [3]. Although different, all forms of communication of nurses with the user are basically made up of several basic forms of therapeutic communication: active listening to patients, understanding their needs, providing support, expressing compassion and giving meaningful advices and directions that will help them to overcome, eliminate or mitigate current health problems [3, 9]. Therapeutic communication is a dynamic process and as such has defined stages that in a real situation can not be clearly identifiable, but interpenetrate each other in achieving the stated goal of communication [6]. The division of stages of therapeutic communication has primarily didactic importance and its primary function is to make guidelines for achieving favorable therapeutic communication in health care; stages are shown in the Table 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 1 (beginning of conversation)</th>
<th>Stage 2 (conducting a flow of conversation)</th>
<th>Stage 3 (end of conversation)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• greet the user by name</td>
<td>• provide privacy</td>
<td>• repeat in front of the user</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• offer the user to sit</td>
<td>• start a conversation with open</td>
<td>everything important what</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• introduce oneself</td>
<td>• use closed questions only when</td>
<td>they said</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• explain the purpose of the</td>
<td>• do not ask too many questions</td>
<td>• check with the user whether</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interview</td>
<td>• maintain eye contact</td>
<td>all is well understood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• loudly indicate the planned</td>
<td>• encourage and stimulate the user</td>
<td>• ask the user if she/he missed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>duration of the interview</td>
<td>• listen carefully</td>
<td>something and whether she/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• turn off the phone</td>
<td>• perceive the user’s non-verbal</td>
<td>he wants to say something</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• do not talk over the shoulder,</td>
<td>• express support, understanding and</td>
<td>else</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>over the counter, in the hallway</td>
<td>compassion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• do not start a conversation by</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>criticism</td>
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</table>

The Importance of Feedback in Therapeutic Communication

Feedback is extremely important in all aspects of communication, and therefore in the therapeutic one [18]. Feedback in therapeutic communication between nurses and patients can have different forms of manifestation - from smiley or frowning, nodding to verbal reactions of patients or changes in their behavior [5]. The literature usually states the five main categories of feedback that occur when conducting therapeutic communication; categories and their characteristics are given in Table 2:
Feedback is an important indicator of the way the message is interpreted and accepted by the recipient, that is, the impact of the sent message on the recipient and possible effects of confounding factors in communication - prejudices [18]. The essence and the basic goal of achieving therapeutic communication in healthcare is building the trust of the user, which is very important for the success of the applied interventions of care. Otherwise, if the nurse does not possess the skills necessary for achieving positive therapeutic communication with the patient, the expected therapeutic effect of communication on the process of nursing and healing will not happen [9].

The literature lists a number of prejudices that may hinder the nurse’s communication with the user of health services, and the most often ones include detachment from the user, perceiving communication with the user as marginal, casual and unimportant things in the process of nursing, lack of education to conduct structured interviews, and very often, avoiding communication with the user due to the existence of the fear of the user’s psychological binding and interference in privacy during the process of communication [6, 9].

**Conclusion**

Health service and all other services, is based on communication between the one who gives (health professional) and the one who receives the health service (patient). Communication is a two-way process in which the skill of listening is very often ignored. Active listening is very laborious mental process and requires much more concentration than speaking, because a good listener also “hears” what is between the lines.

By achieving therapeutic communication, the nurse collects the necessary information on the user of health care, builds basis of mutual trust and respect and creates favorable conditions for the successful outcome of the process of health care. For this reason, therapeutic communication is a very important part of planning the process of health care, which is directed towards solving current and potential problems of users of health care. Since the patient’s healing is the main goal of the application of interventions of health care and treatment process, it can be said with certainty that the skill of communication with the patient and the achievement of positive therapeutic communication is essential and integral part of modern health care and the nursing profession in whole.

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