

Mental Health: Nursing Care Essay Sample

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Essay focus: What skills does a mental health nurse need in order to promote biological, psychological and social health, and why is it important that they do this?

Introduction

This essay discusses the essential skills for a mental health (MH) nurse to promote biological, psychological, and social health in their patients. Mental health nursing requires a holistic approach to care and recognising that mental health is interconnected with physical, emotional, and social wellbeing. MH nurses play a vital role in providing comprehensive care to individuals with mental health conditions, and their skills and abilities significantly impact the overall wellbeing of their patients. Among these skills, therapeutic communication is a fundamental and indispensable tool in facilitating holistic health promotion. Effective communication is essential for building therapeutic relationships, establishing trust, understanding patients' needs, and providing patient-centred care (Moreno-Poyato et al. 2016). The essay will therefore explore the importance of therapeutic communication skills for mental health nurses in promoting holistic health, focusing on biological, psychological, and social aspects, and discuss why it is important for them to do so. It will discuss how these skills contribute to improved patient outcomes and overall wellbeing, and highlight their critical role in providing holistic care to individuals with mental health conditions.

Mental Health and Biopsychosocial (BPS) Model

Mental health services increasingly recognise the importance of taking a biopsychosocial approach to understand and addressing mental health issues (Papadimitriou, 2017). MH nurses need to work in biopsychosocial ways because mental health is a complex and multifaceted aspect of human wellbeing influenced by various biological, psychological, and social factors (Park and Kim, 2019). The biopsychosocial model considers the interplay between biological, psychological, and social factors in shaping an individual's mental health (Porter, 2020). A comprehensive and holistic approach to mental health care should therefore take into account the biological, psychological, and social aspects of an individual's life to provide effective assessment and treatment (Park and Kim, 2019). Biological factors are the genetic, neurochemical, and physiological processes influencing mental health (Davies and Roache, 2017). For instance, certain genetic predispositions may increase the risk of developing mental health conditions such as depression or schizophrenia. Neurochemical imbalances in the brain, such as imbalances in serotonin or dopamine levels, can also affect mental health.

Psychological factors include an individual's thoughts, emotions, behaviours, and cognitive processes, which can significantly impact mental health (Savalescu et al., 2020). For example, maladaptive thought patterns or coping strategies may contribute to developing or maintaining mental health conditions. Psychological interventions, such as psychotherapy or counselling, aim to address these psychological factors and promote mental wellbeing by helping individuals develop healthy coping mechanisms, manage stress, and improve their emotional wellbeing. On the other hand, social factors involve the social and environmental contexts in which individuals live, work, and interact. These may include socioeconomic status, cultural and societal norms, social support

networks, access to resources, and the quality of interpersonal relationships (Porter, 2020). According to WHO (2014), social determinants of health, such as poverty, discrimination, and social isolation, can significantly impact mental health outcomes. The biopsychosocial model, therefore, emphasises the importance of considering and addressing these social factors in understanding and addressing mental health issues.

Mental health practitioners are often drawn to the BPS model due to its holistic approach but may face challenges in implementing it (Wade and Halligan, 2017; Benning, 2015). According to Cox (2021), a thorough clinical assessment should consider all aspects of a patient's functioning across various areas of life. However, challenges arise when transitioning from clinical assessments to actual interventions (Benning, 2015), as the BPS model often takes a back seat to more traditional approaches at this stage. Traditional approaches only prioritise one specific aspect, such as pharmacological treatments for biological imbalances, psychotherapy for psychological distress, or social interventions for addressing social determinants of health (Wade and Halligan, 2017).

Therapeutic Communication skills to promote BPS Health in MH care

When addressing the interconnectedness of mental health and biopsychosocial health, therapeutic communication skills are crucial. Therapeutic communication skills are crucial in promoting patient biopsychosocial health by facilitating effective communication and building therapeutic relationships (Sharma and Gupta, 2021). This is because effective communication can foster trust, rapport, and understanding between the nurse and the patient, improving patient outcomes. The NHS England (2017) highlighted that building a trusting relationship with patients is crucial for effective healthcare delivery. It encourages patients to share important information about their health conditions, concerns, and expectations.

Feo et al. (2017) also noted that trusting relationships foster collaboration, promote patient engagement, and improve health outcomes. Consequently, as noted by the Royal College of Nursing (2016), trust is a fundamental component of the patient- healthcare provider relationship. Patients must trust that their healthcare provider is competent, reliable, and cares about their wellbeing. Effective communication builds this trust by creating an environment where patients feel heard, respected, and valued. Similarly, clear and honest communication about diagnoses, treatment options, risks, and benefits helps patients understand and make informed decisions about their healthcare. However, Salehi et al. (2019) argue that since patients with mental illness sometimes experience fear, paranoia, or suspicion towards others, including healthcare providers, such symptoms can affect their ability to trust. Al Shamsi et al. (2020) also highlighted that communication barriers between healthcare providers and mentally ill patients and their families due to language barriers and cultural differences could lead to misunderstandings, confusion, and mistrust.

Furthermore, actively involving patients in their care requires effective communication encouraging them to express their concerns, preferences, and values. As such, healthcare providers should engage patients in discussions about their health condition, treatment options, risks, and benefits and actively seek their input in decision-making (Eliacin et al. 2015). This can be achieved through active listening, open-ended questions, avoiding medical jargon, and respecting patients' autonomy. However, Hwang et al. (2019) argue that healthcare providers not prioritising patient centred-ness are not likely to actively involve patients in their care, resulting into a paternalistic approach to care where the MH nurses make decisions on behalf of the patients without fully involving them in the decision-making process. Besides, the Mental Capacity Act (2005) notes that this should only

happen when making decisions on behalf of individuals who lack capacity, with the best interests of the individual should be the primary consideration (NHS, 2018).

Biological Aspect of Health

The role of therapeutic communication skills in promoting biological health in mental health care is critical and deserves careful analysis. While often overlooked, the biological aspect of mental health is essential in understanding the complex interplay between the brain, body, and mental wellbeing (Levine et al. 2021). Mental health nurses and other healthcare professionals need to know the physiological processes that influence mental health to provide accurate assessment, monitoring, and interventions. As such, employing therapeutic communication skills can significantly impact the biological health of patients with mental health conditions, including being aware of the impact of medications, identifying physical health concerns, and educating patients about the connection between physical and mental health (Ungar and Theron, 2020)

In utilising therapeutic communication skills to accurately assess and monitor physical symptoms in patients with mental health conditions, nurses take detailed medical history, perform physical examinations, and monitor vital signs. By using open-ended questions and active listening, mental health nurses can obtain relevant information about the patients' physical health, contributing to early detection and management of physical health issues. According to Abe et al (2023) open-ended questions allow patients to provide more detailed and comprehensive responses, which can help uncover physical health issues that may contribute to their mental health condition. On the other hand, active listening involves being fully present and attentive to the patient's verbal and non-verbal cues, which can provide valuable information about their physical symptoms (NMC, 2021). For example, a patient with depression may experience changes in appetite, sleep patterns, or energy levels, which can indicate an underlying physical health problem. By effectively communicating and assessing these symptoms, mental health nurses can collaborate with other healthcare professionals to address any biological health concerns and provide

Therapeutic communication skills can also play a role in medication management, which is a crucial aspect of biological health in mental health care. Mental health nurses often work closely with psychiatrists and other healthcare professionals to administer medications to patients with mental health conditions (Gunasekaran et al. 2022). Effective communication skills are essential in ensuring patients understand the importance of medication adherence, potential side effects, and the need for regular monitoring (Lin et al, 2022). Mental health nurses can educate and support patients, answer their questions, and address any concerns related to medications. Additionally, therapeutic communication skills can help identify any adverse reactions or medication-related issues that may arise and facilitate communication with the prescribing healthcare professional for appropriate interventions.

Furthermore, mental health nurses can utilize therapeutic communication skills to educate patients about the connection between physical and mental health. Many mental health conditions, such as depression, anxiety, and schizophrenia, have known physiological components that impact the body's overall health (Alessi and Bennett, 2020). By explaining to patients the relationship between mental health and physical health, mental health nurses can motivate patients to make healthy lifestyle choices, such as engaging in regular physical activity, maintaining a balanced diet, managing stress, and avoiding substance abuse (Firth et al. 2020). However, Schulz and Nakamoto (2013) argue that patients may have different levels of health literacy, cultural beliefs, or personal barriers that may affect their understanding or willingness to make lifestyle changes. Hence, effective communication skills, such as using clear and simple language, open-ended questions,

active listening, and empathy, interpreters, and being respectful to cultural beliefs and practices can enhance patients' understanding and motivation to make positive changes in their lifestyle, which can significantly impact their biological health (Morrissey and Callaghan, 2011).

Psychological Aspect of Health

In the psychological aspect, therapeutic communication is particularly important, as it focuses on understanding and addressing the emotional and cognitive needs of patients' mental condition. According to Xue and Heffeman (2021), therapeutic communication skills are essential for building a therapeutic relationship with patients. Mental health conditions often come with emotional distress, and patients may experience a wide range of emotions, such as fear, anger, sadness, or confusion (Siregar, Rahmadiyah, and Siregar, 2021). Hence, effective therapeutic communication skills, such as active listening, empathy, and non-judgemental, enable mental health nurses to establish rapport and trust with their patients, which is crucial for facilitating open communication, collaboration, and patient engagement in their care. This creates a safe and non-judgmental environment where patients feel heard, understood, and respected, hence are more likely to share their thoughts, emotions, and concerns essential in identifying the underlying psychological issues and tailoring appropriate interventions. Webster (2014) argues that a strong therapeutic relationship based on effective therapeutic communication can foster a sense of connectedness, support, and collaboration, positively impacting patients' psychological wellbeing.

Therapeutic communication skills are crucial for psychological assessment and intervention (Moreno-Poyato et al. 2017). Mental health nurses need to be skilled in using different communication techniques, such as empathic, non-judgemental attitude, and active listening, to assess patients' psychological status, such as exploring their thoughts, emotions, beliefs, and perceptions. These skills allow mental health nurses to gather information about patients' mental health symptoms, triggers, and coping mechanisms, which is essential for developing an individualised care plan. For instance, through therapeutic communication, mental health nurses can identify patients' cognitive distortions, emotional triggers, or maladaptive coping strategies, informing the development of appropriate interventions, such as cognitive-behavioural therapy, emotional regulation strategies, or psychoeducation (Videbeck and Videbeck, 2013).

Therapeutic communication skills are also critical for facilitating self-expression and self-reflection in patients (Rønning and Bjørkly, 2019). Mental health conditions can often hinder patients' ability to express their thoughts, feelings, and experiences, but through skilled therapeutic communication, such as reflective listening, open-ended questions, and non-judgmental, patients are encouraged to explore their thoughts, emotions, and beliefs. This can promote self-awareness, insight, and understanding, essential for patients to make meaning of their experiences and develop a sense of agency and autonomy. By facilitating self-expression and self-reflection, therapeutic communication skills can empower patients in their recovery journey and contribute to their psychological growth and wellbeing (Martin and Chanda, 2016).

Social Aspect of Health

Therapeutic communication skills can help mental health nurses assess and address patients' social determinants of health (McGowan et al., 2023). By using open-ended questions, active listening, and cultural competence, nurses can explore patients' social environment, including their relationships, support systems, living conditions, and social challenges. This information can contribute to a holistic understanding of patients' mental health and aid in identifying social factors that may impact their wellbeing. Nurses can then work collaboratively with patients to develop strategies to address

these social determinants of health, such as improving social support networks, addressing cultural beliefs, and accessing appropriate community resources.

Effective communication skills can foster a positive nurse-patient relationship, which is a cornerstone of social health (Siregar, Rahmadiyah, and Siregar, 2021). By establishing trust, empathy, and rapport with patients, mental health nurses can create a therapeutic alliance promoting open communication, mutual respect, and collaboration. The NHS England (2017) argue that mental health nurses can only build trust by being honest, reliable and consistent in their patient interactions. Besides, in building rapport, MH nurses should be warm, approachable and non-judgemental. They can use open-ended questions, reflective listening, and non-verbal cues such as eye contact, nodding, and smiling to build patient rapport. By employing these strategies, mental health nurses can establish a therapeutic alliance with patients that promotes open communication, mutual respect, and collaboration. This positive nurse-patient relationship can improve patients' satisfaction with care, adherence to treatment plans, and willingness to engage in social activities, ultimately leading to improved social health outcomes.

Therapeutic communication skills can also facilitate effective communication between patients, their families, and the broader social support network. MH nurses can use their communication skills to facilitate family meetings, provide education and support to families, and assist patients in improving their communication and interpersonal skills (Walker, 2014). According to Bimbaum (2017), family meetings provide open communication, shared-decision making, and mutual support among family members. The role of the MH nurses is to guide the conversation, promote active listening, and facilitate effective communication among family members to improve understanding, resolve conflicts, and strengthen family support, ultimately enhancing the patient's social connections and health (Sveinbjarnardottir and Svavarsdottir, 2019).

Furthermore, therapeutic communication skills can promote social advocacy and empowerment (Xue and Heffernan, 2021). MH nurses can act as advocates for patients ensuring that patients receive appropriate support, resources, and services from the broader social support network, ultimately enhancing patients' social health outcomes (Higgins et al., 2022). NMC (2021) notes that in utilising communication skills such as active listening, empathy, and assertiveness, mental health nurses effectively communicate patients' needs and concerns to relevant stakeholders, such as social workers, case managers, and community organizations, to ensure patients receive the necessary support to address social determinants of health. Besides, by using communication skills such as assertiveness, negotiation, and collaboration, nurses can empower patients to actively participate in their social environment, promote social inclusion, and reduce the stigma associated with mental health conditions (Sunkel, 2012).

Furthermore, Salehi et al. (2019) argue that MH nurses can employ effective communication skills to connect patients with peer support groups, providing valuable social support and helping patients build social networks. These therapeutic communication techniques may include motivational interviewing, active listening, and empathy to encourage patients to engage in social activities. By understanding patients' interests, preferences, and motivations, MH nurses can tailor their communication to promote participation in community programs, events, or group activities that align with patients' interests and values. This can help patients develop a sense of purpose, meaning, and connection with their community, positively impacting their social health. Moreover, by using communication skills such as facilitation, group dynamics, and empathy, mental health nurses can create a safe and supportive environment for patients to connect with others who share similar experiences and challenges. Peer support groups can provide emotional support, practical advice,

and validation, enhancing patients' sense of belonging, reducing isolation, and improving their social health (Salehi et al. 2019).

Conclusion

Conclusively, therapeutic communication skills are crucial in promoting biological, psychological, and social health in mental health nursing practice. Mental health nurses can facilitate holistic patient care by utilising effective communication techniques such as open-ended questions, active listening, cultural competence, assertiveness, negotiation, collaboration, motivational interviewing, and empathy. These communication skills can help nurses gather valuable information about patients' social environment, advocate for their rights and needs, empower patients to participate in their social environment actively, promote social inclusion, reduce stigma, and encourage community engagement. However, these skills may have limitations, including communication challenges and difficulties with severe mental health conditions. Nurses must be aware of these limitations and strive to continuously develop and apply therapeutic communication skills in a patient-centred manner to provide comprehensive and effective care for individuals with mental health conditions.

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