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Shift Report and SBAR

Strategies for Clinical Postconference

by

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Conducting an effective postconference continues to be challenging because of low levels of student participation. Many students are exhausted at the end of the clinical day, which lessens their participation in postconference. In my experience, students often omit important information, such as patients' age, sex, race, and other medical problems, during initial reports. Some have trouble providing patients' information in an organized manner as well. The SBAR (situation-background-assessment-recommendation) communication tool can be used as a strategy to conduct clinical postconference.

Communication is a vital aspect of nursing practice and nursing care. It is one area that nursing students frequently struggle with because of a lack of self-confidence or a lack of experience. To keep students engaged and motivated, I incorporated stimulating activities like shift reports and the SBAR communication tool during clinical postconference.

Wolf¹ described the change of shift report as one of the "most powerful arenas of professional socialization and communication." Professional nurses are constantly communicating with patients, physicians, family members, colleagues, and other members of the interdisciplinary team. One facet of communication that is essential to ensure patient safety is the change of shift report. It is customary to give report to the oncoming shift to ensure continuity of patient care. Preparing nursing students to give good reports acquaints them with the real world of nursing and patient safety issues, one of the healthcare initiatives

instituted by the Institute of Medicine² as a nursing priority.

Breakdown in communication was the leading cause of almost 70% of sentinel events reported to the Joint Commission in the United States between 1995 and 2006.³ In addition, studies show that at least half of communication breakdowns occur during handoffs. Handover communication is the method of relaying patient-specific information from one caregiver to another, from one team of caregivers to the next, or from caregivers to the patient and family for ensuring patient care continuity and safety.³

In response to the national patient safety goals to standardize communication among health caregivers, several hospitals have adopted the SBAR method to communicate critical changes in patient condition to the physician or provide report to the other healthcare providers. The SBAR tool was initially developed by the military and refined by the aviation industry to reduce the risks associated with the transmission of inaccurate and incomplete information.⁴ It is crucial for nursing students to learn the process and value of effective communication to ensure patient safety. The repeated process of using SBAR in their practice will enhance their confidence in interacting with their preceptors, other nurses, physicians, families, and other members of the healthcare team.

Evidence-Based Activities

Shift report and SBAR are appropriate to use with the group of senior nursing students. Instead of a traditional case study discussion, each student can present his/her patient in a form of a shift report. The student provides report in a professional way. The group then analyzes the report given and provides verbal and written feedback, focusing on the good points and any pertinent patient information that is lacking. At the end of the activity, the instructor gives an index card to students, who are asked to offer constructive

feedback about the activity. By repeatedly exposing the students to the same activity (shift report), they are enhancing their communication and organizational skills, which in turn enhances their self-confidence and promotes critical thinking skills.

Another student-centered activity to engage students in the postclinical conference is use of the SBAR communication method in their discussion of patient care and activities. In this group activity, students reflect on a crisis that they experience with a patient that day. One student plays the nurse and another student acts as the physician. Students then take turns role playing. After each scenario, the group analyzes the situation and provides feedback to their peers, focusing on the content of the communication between the nurse and the physician. The same activity may be used in handoff reports when transferring a patient to another unit or facility and transporting patients to another department for procedures/ tests. In this case, students take turns as the unit nurse (student A) and the admitting nurse (student B). The student acting as the unit nurse (student A) may use the SBAR communication tool to give a report. After each scenario, the admitting nurse (student B) would provide verbal feedback about the completeness of the report received from student A (unit nurse).

Discussion

For the past 3 semesters, these 2 activities (shift report and SBAR) have been used during the postconference with groups of 8 senior nursing students during their 6-week advanced medical-surgical rotations. Their verbal feedback and participation were highly positive. The students verbalized increased self-confidence in giving report. The students also felt that they would benefit from the use of the SBAR communication tool in their practice, especially when communicating with their preceptors, physicians, and other vital members of the healthcare team. Overall, the perception from the students and other faculty members with the use of the above activities seemed to be quite successful as a postconference technique

and tool. Furthermore, the students' active participation during role playing was effective in stimulating higher level of learning and critical thinking skills.⁵

The shift report and SBAR activities provide many benefits to students as they study to become professional nurses. However, more research with larger groups of students is needed to explore the effectiveness of the 2 activities in enhancing a nursing student's self-confidence in communicating critical information about patients to other healthcare professionals.

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