



Assessing the Interpersonal Relationship: an assessment Tool to Improve Nursing Education

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ABSTRACT

Effective nursing notations and the nurse/patient relationship are essential for mental health nursing. Therefore, both elements should be included in mental health education and nursing training. Understanding the dynamics involved, however, can be challenging for undergraduate nursing students. Commonly, students from the University of Talca would omit crucial details that were necessary to properly analyze a patient's state of mental health. Some students did not know how to go about establishing professional relationships with the patients. For this reason, a patient assessment guide is highly recommended. This allows for the students to improve their assessment skills.

The main objectives that motivated the design of this tool were to support the nursing student's learning process, promote a systematic record of the main phases of the therapeutic relationship, and apply specific verbal and non-verbal techniques to communicate well with patients.

This evaluation form was designed according to Peplau's middle-range theory of interpersonal relations. The form includes the three phases of the interpersonal relationship: orientation, working, and termination, where the students are required to describe them according to the patient's characteristics and needs.

This cost-effective tool has significantly facilitated the student's learning and training in mental health nursing, specifically the importance of the therapeutic relationship. During the two years when this tool was in practice, students improved their understanding of the main factors involved in the nurse/patient relationship. This nursing form also helps nursing students identify the main aspects involved in mental health assessment. Using this tool has facilitated mental health training for undergraduate nursing students while improving the quality of nursing assessment, ultimately providing high-quality nursing care in mental health.

Keywords: *Assessment; Nursing Assessment; Mental Health Nursing; Education; Health Education; Nurse's Note.*

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INTRODUCTION

This innovation was initiated as a didactic tool in the context of formalizing the recording of the mental examination assessment in 2019, with fourth-year undergraduate nursing students at the University of Talca.

Undergraduate nursing students are required to assist mentally ill people, including their mental health, by following an integrative approach in a clinical setting. Initially, before implementing the assessment tool, it was observed that students commonly omitted crucial information from the assessment of mentally ill patients, neglecting their requirements, as well as missing valuable learning opportunities regarding the professional relationship that they needed to establish with the patients. This relationship is crucial to fully understand the patient's needs, and consequently planning a personalised care plan. Without identifying the person's idiosyncrasies, it is not possible to deliver high quality nursing care. In this context, creating a standardized tool in accordance with the basics concepts and stages of the Therapeutic Relationship between the nursing student and the patient was imperative, giving little room for omissions.

METHODOLOGY

An assessment form was created and implemented to optimise student learning opportunities in the clinical field. These assessment tools assist in the development of care plans by identifying client needs, utilising social resources and evaluating outcomes [1]. In the training of future nursing professionals, a predefined form can contribute to guided training, and also to improving outcomes for recipients of mental health nursing care [2].

The main objectives motivating the design of this tool were to support the learning process of the nursing student, to promote a systematic recording of the patients' mental examination and to apply specific descriptors, called technical concepts, in the assessment of relevant aspects of the nurse-patient relationship.

This assessment sheet was designed according to a systematic and standardised recording system. The therapeutic relationship assessment sheet covers most of the relevant areas in order to comprehensively assess the needs of clients with mental health disorders. This assessment form was designed according to Hildegard Peplau's middle-range interpersonal relationship theory, which describes the therapeutic relationship established between nurse and client; this includes the stages of orientation, working (composed of the phases identification and exploitation), and termination [3]. Accordingly, students should describe their interventions and patient's behaviour, including the three main stages of the therapeutic relationship, communication techniques used, main difficulties observed, among other relevant areas (see table 1). A predefined score is assigned to every area in order to grade the students accordingly and objectively; nursing students must complete every item with their own appreciations about the interaction they have with the client that they are working with. These notes have to integrate technical concepts that they have learnt prior to assessing the patient. For further information, see Appendix 1.

Table 1: Main points by area, as assessed by the evaluation form

Nº	Area	Main items
I	Aspects influencing the therapeutic relationship	Aspects relating to the individual that directly or indirectly influence the therapeutic relationship. It includes biological, social and psychological dimensions.
II	Description of the phases of the Therapeutic Relationship (Hildegard Peplau)	Individualisation of each of the phases of the therapeutic relationship, taking into account the peculiarities of the patient being assessed. The phases are Orientation, Working, and Termination.
III	Verbal Therapeutic Communication Techniques	Verbal therapeutic communication techniques used during the therapeutic relationship and the patient's behaviour towards each of them.
IV	Non-verbal Therapeutic Communication Techniques	Non-verbal communication techniques used to establish the therapeutic bond between the nursing student and the patient.
V	Difficulties observed during the Therapeutic Relationship	Main difficulties encountered during contact with the patient. The moment or stage of the therapeutic relationship at which they occurred should be described, as well as the solution strategies used to overcome the difficulties.
VI	Implications of Nurse-patient relationship	A general question, relevant to the nurse-patient therapeutic relationship as a key aspect of general and mental health nursing in healthcare.
VII	Continuous Improvement of the tool	One question in which the student is asked to make suggestions regarding the assessment tool, which will be considered for future improvements to this registration system.

DISCUSSION

Over the course of 2019 and 2021, this document has been progressively modified along with the students who have used it. Nursing professionals as well as undergraduate nurses must be directly involved in this process, since nursing records are a vital element in healthcare. For this reason, students are asked to be actively involved and openly put forward their suggestions for the continuous improvement of this tool. This has been done in order to facilitate the evaluation of the therapeutic relationship, as well as to encourage the active participation and empowerment of students in the development and evaluation of a record form.

Following the use of this tool, the students suggested modifications that were jointly analysed and eventually incorporated into the form. It should be noted that the process of cooperative enhancement of the tool using student feedback is a relevant component of the student's clinical experience in mental health.

CONCLUSION

This cost-effective tool has significantly facilitated student learning and training in mental health nursing. During the two years that this tool has been applied, the students' records have improved in quality and accuracy. Student feedback was positive.

The biggest difficulty was the students' initial unfamiliarity with the tool, especially in the year 2021, when more items had been added to this sheet. This problem has been addressed by providing a detailed explanation about every item of the tool, and having the nurse coach the person in charge of delivering this information. This process is completed before using this tool with the patients, while answering any questions the students may have, opening discussions and analysing this tool.

Appendix 1: Assessment of the Therapeutic Relationship

Name of the patient: _____ Date of assessment: _____

Responsible student name: _____

I. ASPECTS INFLUENCING THE THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIP	
<i>This section should include aspects relating to the individual that directly or indirectly influence the therapeutic relationship, not just name what they are. 1 point each, 2 in total.</i>	
Biological <i>Alterations in health and/or diagnosed pathologies</i>	_____ _____ _____
Social and Psychological <i>Psychosocial factors of the individual and his or her environment</i>	_____ _____ _____ _____
II. DESCRIPTION OF THE PHASES OF THE THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIP (HILDEGARD PEPLAU)	
<i>Individualisation of each of the phases of the therapeutic relationship, taking into account the particularities of the patient being assessed. Do not forget to synthesise. 1 point each, 3 points in total.</i>	
Orientation <i>Describe the first contact with the patient: behaviour, influencing circumstances, acceptance of limits, etc.</i>	_____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____
Working <i>Record a summary of activities carried out and behaviour (degree of patient collaboration, attitude, etc.).</i>	_____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____

Termination <i>Detail the patient's behaviour after the student leaves at the end of each day and at the end of the clinical practice.</i>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
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III. VERBAL THERAPEUTIC COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES

Detail some of the verbal therapeutic communication techniques that have been used during the therapeutic relationship and the patient's behaviour towards each of them. If one of these techniques has not been used, select the item "null" and explain the reason why it was not used. 1 point each; 11 points in total.

Technique	Effectiveness 0.5 points	Description of patient behaviour 0.5 points each item
Clarification	✕ Total ✕ Partial ✕ None	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Pointing	✕ Total ✕ Partial ✕ None	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Reflex (repetition phrases)	✕ Total ✕ Partial ✕ None	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Reformulation	✕ Total ✕ Partial ✕ None	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Focusing attention	✕ Total ✕ Partial ✕ None	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Facilitation	✕ Total ✕ Partial ✕ None	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Giving information	✕ Total ✕ Partial ✕ None	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Functional silence	✕ Total ✕ Partial ✕ None	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Availability	✕ Total ✕ Partial ✕ None	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

Reinforcement of reality	<input type="checkbox"/> Total <input type="checkbox"/> Partial <input type="checkbox"/> None	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Reflection	<input type="checkbox"/> Total <input type="checkbox"/> Partial <input type="checkbox"/> None	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

IV. NON-VERBAL THERAPEUTIC COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES

State two non-verbal communication techniques that you should have used with this patient to establish the therapeutic bond and explain each one. The explanation should include the patient's behaviour. Do not forget to synthesise.

1 point each, 2 points in total.

V. DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED DURING THE THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIP

Identify the two main difficulties that occurred during the contact with the patient. Detail the moment or stage of the therapeutic relationship at which they occurred, as well as the coping strategies used. Do not forget to synthesise.

1 point each, 2 points in total.

VI. IMPLICATIONS OF NURSE-PATIENT RELATIONSHIP

Section with a development question, relevant to the nurse-patient therapeutic relationship as a key aspect of general and mental health nursing.

2 points in total.

a). Why is it important for health care institutions and facilities to consider nursing and the therapeutic relationship as a model of care relevant to the overall quality of care? Please substantiate your answer.

2 points

VII. CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT OF THE TOOL

*Records are a vital element of care and nursing professionals should be involved in both their creation and their continuous improvement.
Because of this, this section includes two questions asking you to make suggestions that will be considered for future improvements to this record keeping system. This item is formative in nature and your responses will not be scored.*

a). Please briefly share your opinion of this assessment instrument. Was it user friendly, clear, self-explanatory? Please explain.

b). How would you improve the quality of this form? Please give at least two suggestions regarding this register.

Thank you very much for completing this assessment tool.

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