

Therapeutic Communication at its Hardest

“What is the importance of nurses using therapeutic communication to improve health outcomes for unconscious patients?”

Introduction

Therapeutic communication is a vital element of nursing. Family members and nurses alike are put in a difficult position when a patient has an altered level of consciousness (Ahmad & Alasad, 2005). Communication with an unconscious patient is known to improve health outcomes as it reduces feelings of isolation, anxiety, and orientates them to the clinical environment (Othmann & EL-hady, 2015).

Verbal therapeutic communication is crucial for an unconscious patient. It provides invaluable reassurance knowing a loved one is there. Familiar voices are known to help stimulate brain activity (EL-hady & Othman, 2015).

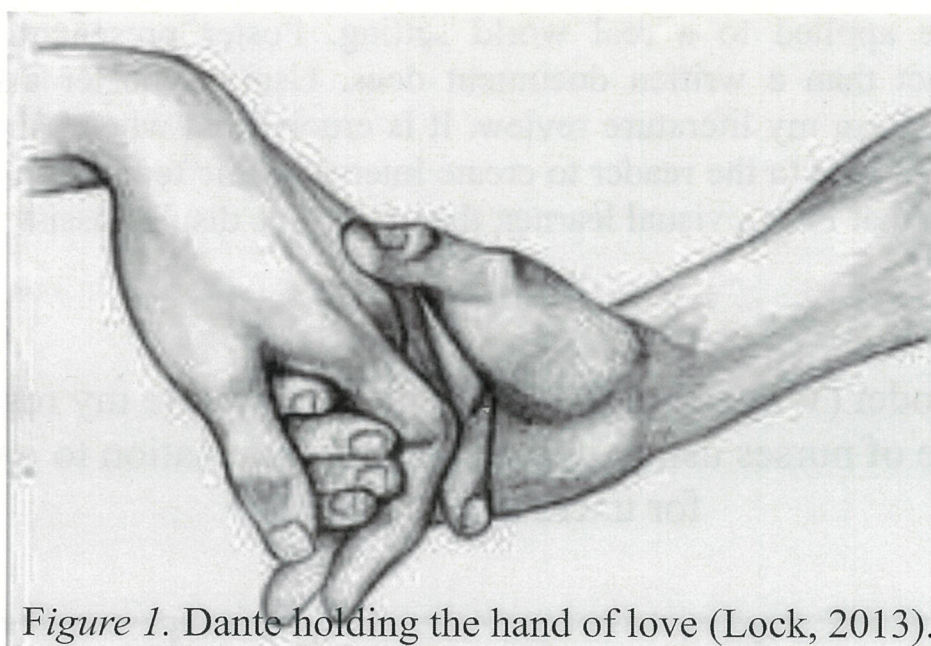


Figure 1. Dante holding the hand of love (Lock, 2013).

Therapeutic touch is a non-verbal communication technique that sends the patient positive messages, it tells them that you are there for them and have their best interests at heart. It is known to reduce stress and provide comfort (Gamble, 1981).

Implications

Unconscious patients do not initiate conversation and it can be difficult to read feedback signs (Ahmad & Alasad, 2005).

Nurses working with critically ill patients simply may not have enough time to spend communicating with unconscious patients.

Nonverbal cues which may be given by the patient:

- Lipreading
- Head-nodding
- Limb movements
- Gesturing
- Blinking

Potential Patient Benefits

Therapeutic communication is known to have some of following effects on the patient: increased blood pressure, respiratory rate, pulse, a decrease in feelings of social isolation, voluntary limb movements and an increased level of consciousness (Jesus, Simões & Voegeli, 2013).

Recommendations

- Be at the same height level as the patient - the best way is to sit beside the bed
- Silence can be therapeutic when used alongside touch
- Put yourself in the patients position - what would you like to be told?
- Allow time each day with the patient and try not to rush responses
- Distribute resources to the family members and nurses to provide education and encouragement
- If possible, the use of interactive communication boards can help ensure basic needs of the patient are met

Conclusion

By investigating this topic through a literature review, I have discovered that communicating with a patient with an altered level of consciousness may seem difficult, however, it is beneficial to the patient. By implementing communication techniques such as therapeutic touch, interactive communication boards, and reassuring verbal communication, the patient will be assisted in feeling more comfortable and have improved health outcomes. By nurses and family members taking on board the recommendations as listed above means that unconscious patients can receive effective therapeutic communication to increase the chances of improved health outcomes. By communicating with the unconscious patient you are advocating on their behalf.

References

- Ahmad, M., & Alasad, J. (2005). Communication with critically ill patients. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 50(4), 356-362.
- EL-hady, M., & Othman, S. (2015). Effect of structured communication messages on the clinical outcomes of unconscious patients. *Journal of Nursing Education and Practice*, 5(9), 117-131.
- Gamble, V. (1981). Therapeutic touch for critically ill patients. In D. A. Zschoche. (Ed.), *Mosby's Comprehensive review of critical care* (pp. 115-119). Missouri, United states of America: The C. V. Mosby Company.
- Lock, A. (2013). Dante holding the hand of love. Retrieved from <http://amygowenlock.deviantart.com/art/Dante-Holding-the-Hand-of-Love-354286725>
- Jesus, L. M. T. D., Simões, J. F. F. L., & Voegeli, D. (2013). Verbal communication with unconscious patients. *Acta Paul Enferm*, 26(5), 506-513.

Rationale

I have decided to use a poster to display my results from my literature review, due to the visual aspects commonly displayed in a poster enables me to clearly and concisely display my findings to inform my wide target audience to include both family members and nurses. Using a poster also allows me to employ a range visual elements to grab the individual's attention more effectively than some methods of communication. Due to my target audience including family members, I cannot rely purely on words to communicate the message. This form of communication has the potential to be displayed in both waiting rooms and staff rooms, educating family members and nurses when they are away from the patient. Overall, posters an effective communication tool. Posters allow the reader to engage quickly to grasp the main concepts within then information (Miller, 2007). Miller (2007) also suggests that a successful poster is where the information can be applied to a real world setting. Poster presentations are eye-catching and create significantly more of an impact than a written document does. Using a poster also allowed me to use colour to effectively display my findings from my literature review. It is crucial that when using a poster that the body is clear, concise and highlights the main points to the reader to create interest in the topic discussed. Another reason I decided to present my results in a poster, is that I am a visual learner, therefore, this display assisted my learning style.

The PECOT model (Whitehead, 2013) was used to refine my research question:
What is the importance of nurses using therapeutic communication to improve health outcomes for unconscious patients?

PECOT CATEGORY	Information relating to question	Explanation
Population	Unconscious/ sedated patients	Within the intensive/ critical care setting
Exposure	Health professionals communicating with the patient	Through working in a collaborative partnership together
Comparsion	Postive feedback with nurse-patient communication	I wanted to explore if by not talking to unconscious patients, does this have a impact on the health outcomes for the patient
Outcome	Improved health outcomes such as increased blood pressure, respiratory rate, pulse, decrease in feeling of social isolation, voluntary limb movements and increased level of consciousness	Therapeutic communication by nurses has been proven to improve the overall health status of the unconscious patient
Time	N/A	N/A

(Whitehead, 2013).

References

Miller, J. E. (2007). Preparing and presenting effective research posters. *Health Services Research*, 42(1), 311–328.

Whitehead, D. (2013). Searching and reviewing the research literature. In Z. Schneider & D. Whitehead (Eds.), *Nursing and Midwifery Research: Methods and appraisal for evidence-based practice* (4th ed.) (pp. 35-56). Chatswood, NSW: Elsevier Australia.