Setting Priorities

And Making Assignments

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Setting Priorities

Priority setting is an important skill in nursing.

A skill deficit can have serious consequences for patients.

Recent studies have suggested that it is a difficult skill for new nurses to acquire.

Priority

Definition: deciding which needs or problems require immediate action and which ones may be delayed until a later time because they are not urgent.

Factors Impacting Priority Setting

Expertise of the nurse

The patient’s condition

The availability of resources

Philosophies and models of care

The nurse-patient relationship

The cognitive strategy used by the nurse to set priorities

Guidelines for Prioritizing

Identify the problems of each client.

Review the nursing diagnoses.

Determine which client problems are most urgent on the basis of needs, the client’s changing or unstable status, and the complexity of the client’s problems.

Anticipate the time it may take to care for the priority needs of the client.

If possible, combine activities to resolve more than one problem at a time.

Involve the client in his or her own care as much as possible.

Guidelines for Prioritizing

Priorities are classified as high, intermediate, or low.

The ABS’s – airway, breathing, circulation- can be used as a guide when determining priorities.
Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory can be used as a guide for determining priorities.

The steps of the clinical problem solving process can be used as a guide when determining priorities.

Making Assignments

Assigning – the method used to distribute work among team members for the shift.

Assignment always occurs at the beginning of the shift, and as the need arises during the shift.

Assign tasks to team members that are within their job description.

Factors to Consider when making Assignments

Priority of patient needs

Complexity of patient needs

Geography of the nursing unit

Other responsibilities of the staff

Need for patient isolation and/or protection

Skill, education and competency of the staff

Lunch/break times

Need for fair work distribution among the staff

Need to protect patients and staff from injury

Shift Action Plan

Plan

- What is the big picture?
- What are the desired outcomes?
- What are the priorities?

Shift Action Plan

Intervention

- What are the tasks to be accomplished?
- Who is available to do the work, and what skills and attributes do the personnel have? (What can the RN do? The LPN? The NAP?)
- When should the actions be completed by? What are the guidelines for completion?
- When are staff breaks/lunches scheduled?
☐ Shift Action Plan
☐ Evaluate
   ■ Are the shift outcomes achieved?