

# COLLABORATION, CREDIBILITY, COMPASSION, AND COORDINATION: PROFESSIONAL NURSE COMMUNICATION SKILL SETS IN HEALTH CARE TEAM INTERACTIONS

JULIE APKER, PhD,\* KATHLEEN M. PROPP, PhD,† WENDY S. ZABAVA FORD, PhD,‡ AND  
NANCEE HOFMEISTER, RN, BSN§

This study explored how nurses communicate professionalism in interactions with members of their health care teams. Extant research shows that effective team communication is a vital aspect of a positive nursing practice environment, a setting that has been linked to enhanced patient outcomes. Although communication principles are emphasized in nursing education as an important component of professional nursing practice, actual nurse interaction skills in team-based health care delivery remain understudied. Qualitative analysis of interview transcripts with 50 participants at a large tertiary hospital revealed four communicative skill sets exemplified by nursing professionals: collaboration, credibility, compassion, and coordination. Study findings highlight specific communicative behaviors associated with each skill set that exemplify nurse professionalism to members of health care teams. Theoretical and pragmatic conclusions are drawn regarding the communicative responsibilities of professional nurses in health care teams. Specific interaction techniques that nurses could use in nurse–team communication are then offered for use in baccalaureate curriculum and organizational in-service education. (Index words: Communication; Nursing; Education; Health care teams) *J Prof Nurs* 22:180–9, 2006. © 2006 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

**I**N RECENT YEARS, organizations such as the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) and nurse educators in academic institutions as well as health care facilities nationwide have called for heightened emphasis on professionalism in nursing (AACN,

2002; Weis & Schank, 2002). This advocacy has highlighted the need to improve the professional nurse practice environment in ways that contribute to nursing excellence (AACN, 2002). Health care organizations are encouraged to implement system changes that promote full professional status for nurses in an effort to attract as well as retain qualified nursing staff and to achieve positive patient outcomes (AACN, 2002; Aiken, Havens, & Sloane, 2000; Aiken, Sochalski, & Lake, 1997).

Because teams play an increasingly important role in the current health care system (Poole & Real, 2003), a vital aspect of proposed nursing environment improvements centers on enhancing the team-based structures in which many nurses practice (Ritter-Teitel, 2002). The increase in health care teams has made professional nursing practice even more salient, requiring nurses to serve as links between team members and as liaisons between the team and other constituencies (e.g., patients

---

\*Assistant Professor, School of Communication, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI.

†Associate Professor, School of Communication, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI.

‡Professor and Associate Dean, College of Arts and Sciences, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI.

§Nursing Director, Professional Practice Development, Bronson Healthcare Group, Kalamazoo, MI.

Address correspondence and reprint requests to Dr. Apker: School of Communication, Western Michigan University, 1903 W. Michigan Ave., Kalamazoo, MI 49008-5318. E-mail: julie.apker@wmich.edu 8755-7223/\$ - see front matter

and their families, administrators). The scope of nurses' professional practice extends beyond the patient bedside to involve heightened team communication. Nurses routinely collaborate with physicians, interact with allied health caregivers, supervise assistant personnel, and coordinate services across the health care continuum in their role responsibilities (Apker & Fox, 2002; Miller & Apker, 2002). In short, the health care system requires nurses to communicate successfully with multidisciplinary team members and with patients as well as their families.

Given the myriad of communicative role demands placed upon today's nurses, it is not too surprising that effective communication is a skill considered essential to professional nursing practice (AACN, 1998) and that the teaching and learning of good communication are central to nursing accreditation standards (Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education, 2003). Reflecting the importance of communication in nursing roles, nurse educators have designed curricula that emphasize communication principles grounded in theory and professional practice. However, what is needed to reinforce nurse educators' efforts is research based on actual nurse interactions, particularly the discourse occurring between nurses and other members of their health care teams. Such in situ research would provide nurses with authentic examples of how to successfully communicate with others and overcome communication barriers (Kotecki, 2002).

Furthermore, because modern nurses function as the central link of their health care teams and interact with a wide range of health care providers with varying needs (Miller & Apker, 2002), it is imperative that research on nurse–team communication focus on actual discourse that occurs between nurses and *all* team members. Past research tended to focus on nurse–physician relationships within health care teams when an understanding of nurse relationships with non-physician team members is also needed (Poole & Real, 2003). Ultimately, the more nursing students understand and practice nurse–team communication skills, the better equipped they will be to learn the ropes of their teams and employing organizations (Apker & Fox, 2002).

To this end, the goal of this study was to identify the professional nurse communication skills that are considered to be effective in health care team interactions. It is hoped that the study findings would help improve the communicative processes that characterize nurses' team relationships and help foster an environment of respect for professional nursing practice.

### Literature Review

Professionalism in health care occupations has received attention from scholars for several decades. Classic work by Freidson (1970, 1988) primarily focused on physicians and emphasized the significance of job commitment and autonomy in fostering professionalism. Researchers have also examined professionalism in

other health care occupations in an effort to understand quality-of-work life issues and patient outcomes. Nurse professionalism has figured prominently in this line of research, with nursing scholars examining the characteristics of professionalism. For example, baccalaureate education is an often-cited factor considered critical to fostering perceptions and attitudes of professionalism among nurses (AACN, 2002; Miller, Adams, & Beck, 1993; Weis & Schank, 2002). In addition to acknowledging the importance of education, research by Adams and Miller (2001) and Wade (1999) point to factors such as knowledge, skill level, and autonomy as key indicators of professional nursing status. In related scholarship, Weis and Schank emphasized the contributions of occupational principles and service to the development of nurse professionalism.

In addition to these traditional indicators, communication is increasingly cited as a defining quality of nurse professionalism (Ohlen & Segesten, 1998; Wade, 1999). Nurses are considered as central figures in team communication as they build interdependence and engage in joint decision making (Wade, 1999). Today's professional nurses must be effective communicators not only at the patient bedside but also in their interactions with colleagues within their core health care teams (Coulon, Mok, Krause, & Anderson, 1996). The modern nursing paradigm requires nurses to successfully enact traditional communication processes (e.g., education, empathy) with patients as well as their families and demonstrate new communicative skills (e.g., conflict resolution, change management) when interacting with colleagues (Miller & Apker, 2002).

As some scholars have investigated the precursors to or the definitional properties of professional nursing, other researchers have examined the results of professionalism. Extant research suggest that professional nursing practice enhances patient outcomes and improves nurse quality of work life (AACN, 2002). Of note is the work by Aiken et al. (2000), whose research linked magnet hospital status—a designation that recognizes health care institutions for excellence in professional nursing practice—to improved health care delivery and higher nurse recruitment as well as retention (see Aiken et al., 2000; Scott, Sochalski, & Aiken, 1999). This research suggests that improving nurses' practice environment can reduce health care costs and help solve the current nursing shortage.

Past scholarship indicates that professionalism is a multifaceted concept that can lead to beneficial outcomes for patients, nurses, and organizational employers. Team communication plays a primary role in professional nursing practice as modern nurses are expected to coordinate health care team processes, function as the information link among team members, and serve as the liaison between caregivers and patients (Miller & Apker, 2002; Miller, Joseph, & Apker, 2000). However, less is known about the specific discursive requirements that define nursing professionals in the team environment. To this end, we pose the following

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/2667831>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/2667831>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)