



Critical Thinking in Ambulatory Care Nursing: Making Decisions in Complex Practice Situations

Amy B. Harris, MSN, RN, OCNS-C
Clinical Nurse Specialist
Orthopaedic Department
Children's National Medical Center

www.childrensnmc.com

OBJECTIVES

- Define critical thinking.
- List critical thinking skills integral to ambulatory care nursing practice.
- Discuss the positive outcomes associated with adequately developing critical thinking skills.
- Identify characteristics of critical thinkers.
- Make decisions in complex practice situations utilizing critical thinking skills.

ORTHOPAEDIC DEPARTMENT

- 10 Attendings
- 1 Chief Resident
- 5 Orthopaedic Residents
- 1 Podiatry Resident
- 5 P.A.'s
- 1 Clinical Nurse Specialist
- 1 Nurse Practitioner (Ortho Oncology NP)
- 1 Patient Care Coordinator (Social Worker)
- 1 Nurse Manager (Position Vacant)
- 1 prn R.N.
- 1 PCT
- 1 LPN (Position Vacant)
- 4 Orthopaedic Technicians
- 2 Surgical Schedulers
- COR staff

SPECIALTY CLINICS

- Fracture Clinic
- Upper Extremity Clinic
- CP Clinic
- Spasticity Clinic (in Physical Medicine Dept)
- Bone Health Clinic
- Skeletal Dysplasia / Osteogenesis Imperfecta and Pre-Natal Clinic (in Genetics)
- Spina Bifida Clinic (in Physical Medicine Dept)
- Sports Medicine Clinic
- Scoliosis Clinic
- "Toe" clinic

NURSING RESPONSIBILITIES

- Clinic Management
- Patient / Family Advocacy
- Triage
- Clinic Flow
- JCAHO Compliance
- Chart Prep
- General Troubleshooting

CRITICAL THINKING

Critical thinkers in nursing apply intellectual skills and use sound reasoning to make decisions in complex practice situations

Why do we need to develop critical thinking skills?

Problems confronting nurses today emphasize the need for more than just rote memory, knowledge of skills, and the ability to follow directions.

Why is critical thinking important?

Nurses must:

- Synthesize large amounts of information.
- Think through complex clinical situations.
- Make critical decisions as emergent patient care issues arise.

Critical Thinking

- Clear thinking that is active, focused, persistent, and purposeful.
- A process of choosing, weighing alternatives, and considering what to do.
- Involves citing reasons for believing one thing rather than another in an open, flexible, and attentive way.
- Means learning to ask pertinent questions and becoming aware of one's assumptions.

Critical Thinking

Includes:

- Adherence to intellectual standards
- Proficiency in using reasoning
- A commitment to develop and maintain intellectual traits of the mind and habits of thought
- Competent use of thinking skills and abilities for sound clinical judgements and safe decision-making

Critical Thinking Skills

- Information Gathering
- Focusing
- Remembering
- Organizing
- Analyzing
- Generating
- Integrating
- Evaluating

Characteristics of a Critical Thinker

CURIOSITY

The desire, not just to know, but to understand how and why, to apply knowledge

SYSTEMATIC THINKING

Uses an organized approach to problem solving, rather than knee-jerk responses

Characteristics of a Critical Thinker

SELF CONFIDENT

Sense of assurance that the problem solving process produces a good conclusion / plan

MATURITY

Recognition that many variables are at work in patient / family situations, and sometimes the best plans do not work

Characteristics of a Critical Thinker

ANALYTICAL

Applies knowledge from various disciplines, approaches a problem by examining the parts and seeing how they fit together.

OPEN MINDED

Willing to consider various alternatives

Characteristics of a Critical Thinker

TRUTH SEEKING

Eager to know, asks questions, seeks answers, reevaluates “common knowledge”.

Development and Use of Critical Thinking

Practitioner responsibilities

- Ability and skills
- Willingness and motivation

Organization's responsibility

- Creation of an environment that supports critical thinking

Challenges in Ambulatory Care

- Apply general nursing knowledge to the ambulatory care setting as care is provided.
- Use specialized nursing knowledge to provide quality care to patients with a variety of needs.
- Demonstrate essential clinical skills.
- Exhibit extraordinary communication skills.

- Ambulatory care nurses are committed to providing safe, effective quality patient family centered care.
- Ambulatory care nurses that develop their critical thinking skills can enter empathetically and analytically into the perspective of others (parents, patients, and coworkers).

Critical Thinking / Ambulatory Care

- Clinic Management
- Patient / Family Advocacy
- Triage
- Clinic Flow
- JCAHO Compliance
- Chart Prep
- General Troubleshooting

Critical Thinking and Delegation of Nursing Care

- How do nurses use critical thinking to delegate nursing care?
- What factors affect nurses as they delegate care?
- What expectations do nurses have in regards to the knowledge base of their team members?
- How does team members roles / relationships affect the care delivered?
- How does communication and teamwork affect care delivery?
- How does the organizational system support the delegation process?

PHONE TRIAGE

Definition

The process of prioritizing sick or injured people for treatment according to the seriousness of the condition or injury through the use of a telephone as the means of communication.



PHONE TRIAGE



INCOMING CALL

Pt / Family calls:
R.N. reviews
Medical Record and
provides advice

Appointment calls
R.N. gathers
information and
triages pt to
appropriate clinic

Other calls
R.N. assists caller
to obtain necessary
forms, information,
etc.

TRiage TRICKS OF THE TRADE

(Top 10 Triage pointers)

1. Follow through on all calls trivial, urgent, emergent or somewhere in between.
2. Make good use of time while on the phone (multi-task).
3. Use all your available resources.
4. Trust your instincts and **USE YOUR CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS!**
5. Document!
6. Introduce yourself by name with each and every call.
7. The customer is always right.
8. Communicate your plan, etc. via e-mail, pager and through use of the documentation tool.
9. Handle irate family members with kid gloves (if in doubt refer back to #7)
10. Follow through on any planned intervention.

PHONE TRIAGE

- Can be challenging and yet rewarding for nurses in a variety of out-patient settings
- Sometimes seems more than an art than a science and yet is truly both
- Requires patience and excellent communication skills which can be honed with time and experience
- Is invaluable in today's healthcare environment

CRITICAL
THINKING
PRACTICE
SCENARIOS



Scenario #1

Patient

A.J.

Diagnosis

3 y/o with Fracture Left Femur treated with Closed Reduction and Spica Casting

Issues

- Peri area skin breakdown
- A.J.'s fear and anxiety over cast repair (use of cast saw)

Question

Which critical thinking thinking skills and characteristics will you demonstrate as nursing care is planned for A.J.?

Scenario #2

- K.L. is a 16 month old female that is standing and cruising and yet unable to walk as of yet. Her parents accompany her to the Bone Health clinic.

Work-Up

- X-Rays
- Lab Work
- Nutritional Assessment

Issues

1. Parents are very worried about K.L.
2. Work up is positive for Rickets and the parents have a lot of questions.

Question: Put your critical thinking caps on and consider times such as this when you have worked with families facing a new diagnosis.

Scenario #3

- C.R. is a 38 y/o woman accompanied by her father for a pre-natal visit to the Genetics clinic. The 22 week fetus that C.R. is carrying has been diagnosed in utero with distal arthrogryposis.

In the days subsequent to the Genetics Clinic appt C.R. calls and e-mails several times asking questions about this diagnosis.

Questions:

- How do you best triage these calls and e-mails?
- Will your critical thinking skills help you empathize with C.R. and guide you as you direct her to helpful resources?

Scenario #4

Two attendings and an N.P. have clinics going on simultaneously today. It is standing room only at this point in the waiting room and the staff and families are both getting irritable. Just as you are thinking there is no end to this craziness your on call resident that has been helping gets a call and leaves to go to the E.R.

On days like this how can the staff and the organization pull together to provide quality family centered care?

Summary

- Critical thinking is the disciplined, intellectual process of applying skillful reasoning as a guide to belief or action (Paul, Ennis, and Norris).
- Nurses develop their intellectual capacities and skills in order to become disciplined, self-directed, critical thinkers.

References

- Registered Nurses Association of British Columbia:
Statement on Critical Thinking, 1990.
- Green, Carol. 2007. "Critical Thinking in Nursing: Case Studies Across the Curriculum"
- Bittner, N.P., and Gravlin, G. "Critical Thinking, Delegation, and Missed Care in Nursing Practice" JONA, March 2009.
- Kuckyt, Catherine. "Nursing Process and Critical Thinking". 2008.
- Foundation for Critical Thinking:
www.criticalthinking.org



