

The Role of Communication Skills in Acquiring Soft Skills for Nurses

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Abstract

In every profession, soft skills play an important role to be effective and successful. Different soft skills are needed in different professions. Nurses and nursing managers are the professionals who need both clinical skills as well as soft skills. If one wants to be reliable and professionally competitive they need to acquire the needed soft skills through effective communication skills. In the 21st Century, the very question of getting a job as a nursing professional does not depend on mere certification with clinical skills but also in having the necessary soft skills. A study was conducted among a group of nurses and nursing managers to know whether they are aware of essential nursing soft skills and how far do they agree that communication skills play an important role in acquiring the needed soft skills. The results show that most of them are not aware of the needed soft skills and many of them do not agree that effective communication plays an important role in acquiring the other soft skills.

Keywords: nurse soft skills, communication skills, nursing essential soft skills

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INTRODUCTION

Most of the successful professional courses are defined by their qualifying degrees, certifications, and their professional skills. In fact, professional soft skills are not given importance and therefore their communication skill is below their professional standard. Ray and Overman examined the existing health care system for sicker patients, for a shorter stay, and for multiple units' transfers, which refers to the need to have clear coordination between all the providers of health care which may adversely impact hospital reimbursemen (Dlamini & Sibiyi, 2020; Duane & Satre, 2014). Relationship with a public whether it is a patient or a patient attendee, relationship with higher officials from different departments or in any form of intervention by different departments in the health care. All these involve a lot of contacts which needs to paid attention to. Contact here means the interpersonal relationships among the medical professionals, between nurses and the patients and nurses and patient attendees. Communication becomes as important as giving clinical care(Hariti & Rejeki, 2020; LaFevers, Ward-Smith, & Wright, 2015) Thus the reason behind this study is for nursing professionals to become aware the importance of the soft skills which play a vital in their nursing profession. This study will help them to create awareness of such skills and motivate them to acquiring with the help of effective communicative skills.

Soft skills are not separate entities. Every soft skill is combined with many other skills such as people skills, social skills, communication skills, characters or personality traits, attitudes, career attributes, social intelligence, and emotional intelligence quotients that help the professionals to successfully carry out their work well with others, individually perform well and achieve both institutional and individual goals. Moreover, soft skills vary from profession to profession. However having excellent communication skill can enable professionals to acquire needed soft skills in their profession.(Maillet & Read, 2021)

Besides the clinical skills, for health care professionals like nurses to showcase excellent interactions with patients, their families, colleagues and other higher officials, soft skills play a major role. Soft skills are in fact individual attributes which help nurses to perform extraordinarily well.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Both nursing educators and nurses need to be equipped with proper communicational skills such as using correct words, non-verbal communication to acquire soft skills. Educators especially need to be equipped with excellent soft skills such as presentation skills, interpersonal skills etc., while maintaining their clinical skills (including pharmacology, care plans, and clinical rotations) in education. Nursing professional soft skills help them in their profession for better patient care.(Mullan & Kothe, 2010)

If one needs to have sound relationships among the nurses, patients, and patient-attendees, communication becomes the most important aspect. That effective communication skill is possible only with the help of soft skills which in turn helps to collaborate and cooperate. Nurses with professionally needed soft skills are better communicators and perform better in their profession.

To communicate effectively, it is expected that people in every profession need to pay attention to soft skills. In some countries, soft skills are known as people skills. People consider that soft skills are crucial in profession like nursing and they outplay the technical knowledge and professional skills.

People involved in the medical profession consider communication as one of the top most needed soft skills. The reason is very simple just because they consider if one has communication skills he or she can easily acquire other soft skills. It is a well-known fact that communication plays a major role in cultivating other soft skills.(Ray & Overman, 2014)

Fakhr and his team researched and have stated clearly that communication is an important aspect of nursing care and much of nurses duties such as providing physical care, emotional support, and exchanging of information with patients cannot be performed without communication(Fakhr-Movahedi, Salsali, Negharandeh, & Rahnavard, 2011)

Melissa Mills in the article titled '10 Essential Nurse Communication Skills for Success'. The list clearly indicates how communication skill is important in the nursing profession. The list consists of other soft skills that are related to communication skills.

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the paper is to analyze how communication skill plays a major role among the nurses in their work place. It was explicit that many nurses who are smart in their work place are smart communicators. Unfortunately, most of them fail to realize the need of acquiring language skills in order to communicate effectively while they are doing their qualifying degrees. The following research questions were accordingly framed:

1. Why the importance of communication skill is neglected in nursing education?
2. What are reasons behind nurses failing in acquiring soft skills?
3. How can nurses possibly be trained in communication skills in order to improve their soft skills?

The following hypotheses were set for validation:

1. Through proper intervention during the nursing education, communicative skill can be acquired.
2. Nurses who are excellent in practicing their soft skills in their workplaces are due to the communication skill that they have.

Two different closed-type questionnaires were designed based on the list of essential soft skills listed by (Hariti & Rejeki, 2020; Mullan & Kothe, 2010). Based on the two lists the survey was designed and implemented among Chennai based 250 nurses and nursing managers. It took place from June to August 2021 at nine clinical departments (Surgical; Orthopedic; Hematology; Nephrology; Oncology; Cardiology; Pediatric; Pathology A and B) of Ramachandra Medical College. Due to the prevailing pandemic situation, the questionnaires were sent through Google forms through WhatsApp and emails. Though the questionnaires were sent to 250 nurses and nursing managers only 192 responded within the stipulated time.

RESULTS

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics

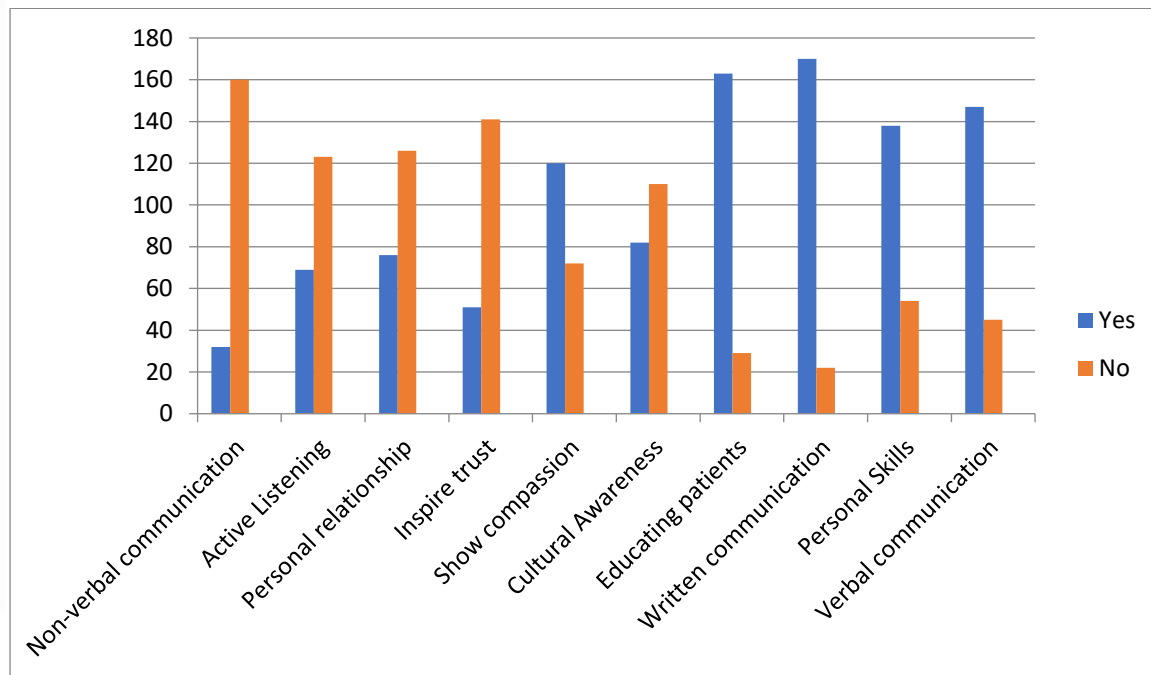
		Nurses	Nursing managers
Sex	Male	57	4
	Female	112	19
Age	25-34	118	4
	35-44	30	4
	45 and above	22	14
Marital status	Single	35	2
	Married	123	16
	Divorced	11	5
No.of children	None	14	9
	1-2	124	24
	3 and above	14	7
Work experience	1-5	66	3
	6-15	44	3

15 and above	72	4
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	Nurses	Nursing managers
Clinical divisions		
Hematology	11	1
Nephrology	17	2
Oncology	21	3
Cardiology	20	3
Pediatric	29	2
Surgical	38	4
Ortho	13	2
Pathology A	11	1
Pathology B	13	1

Besides basic information about the respondents, the major parts of the two questionnaires collected information about whether the respondents are aware of the soft skills and whether they agree or disagree on the importance of communication skills in acquiring the other soft skills.

Table 2: Are you aware of the following 10 essential soft skills



Most of the respondents are aware of essential communication skills such as written communication, educating patients, verbal communication, and showing compassion. Less than 50 percent of the respondents are less aware of cultural awareness, personal relationships, active listening, inspiring trust, non-verbal communication. Perhaps one possible reason is that the respondents did not understand the meaning of the essential communications which they are least aware of. Another possibility is that they are not completely aware of the essential soft skills such as cultural awareness, personal relationship, active listening, inspiring trust, non-verbal communication.

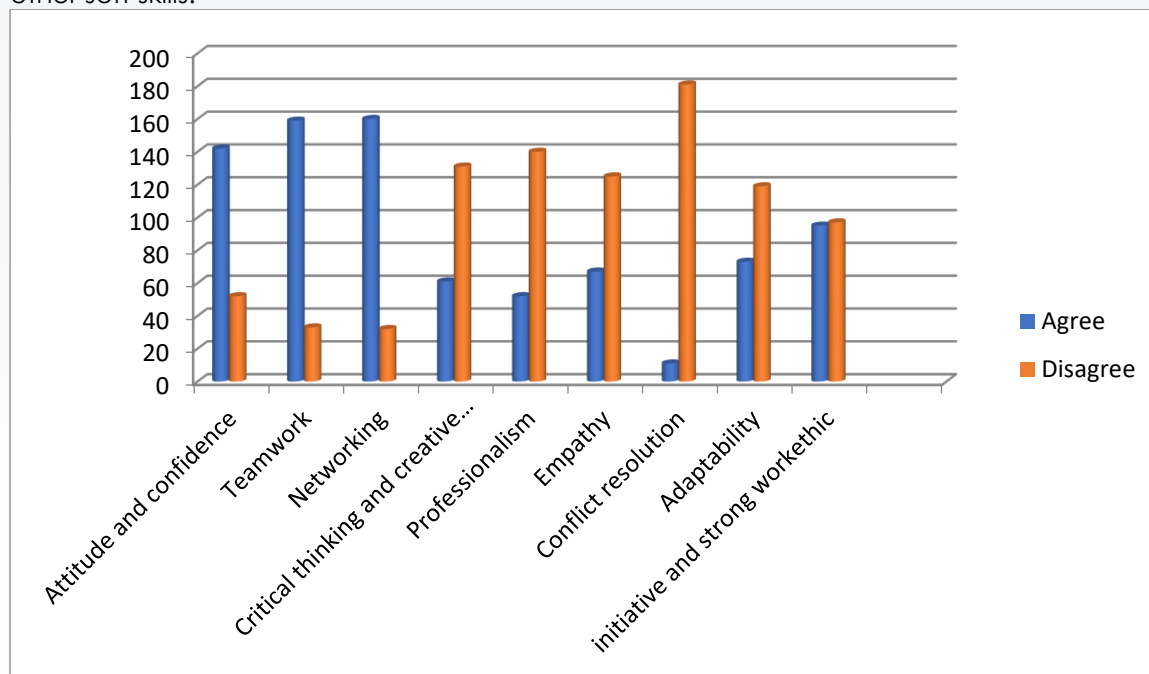
Until and unless the nursing professionals are not aware of the soft skills that need to be known, learned, and practiced they cannot make an effective use of the soft skills which will make them to be confident, be creative so as to do justice to their profession. For nurses communication skills are the top priority in their profession. In order to be successful in their profession, it is communication skill which in turn makes them self directed and self-supportive together with the professional soft skills.

In the second questionnaire, there was another set of ten soft skills needed for nurses proposed by (Duane & Satre, 2014).

Table 3: State whether you agree or disagree that effective communication skills are vital in acquiring the other soft skills.

The following is the summary, and outcome of the results.

This questionnaire was conducted to know whether the respondents i.e. nurse and nursing managers agree or disagree on the importance of the role of communication skills to acquire other soft skills.



The result shows that the respondents agree that communication skills play an important role in acquiring soft skills such as attitude and confidence, teamwork and networking. More than 50% of the respondents disagree that communication skills don't play an important role acquiring a few soft skills. Almost equal respondents agree and disagree that communication skills play an important role in acquiring a soft skill namely initiative and strong work ethic.

It is a well-known fact that communication plays an important role in acquiring the other soft skills. During pandemic situation when there are many sicker patients, their length of stay is unknown and extra care with due protocols effective communication plays a vital role. (Hariti & Rejeki, 2020; Mullan & Kothe, 2010) states that a successful nursing career is not just defined by educational degree, certifications, and hard clinical skills, but also in the ability to use soft skills to foster excellent patient outcomes and make a positive difference in the healthcare organization's future (Hariti & Rejeki, 2020) Nurses and nursing managers who have effective communication skills not only acquire other soft skills but also become effective and successful.

DISCUSSION

Having effective communication skills in every profession helps individuals to acquire other professional-based soft skills. For healthcare professionals, especially nursing professionals, these skills become all the more important as they are dealing with human lives. There is communication everywhere. If one has effective communication skills he or she outshines and looks to be more confident and successful. Only a person with proper communication skills can have effective interpersonal interaction, become a team leader, have management skills, be able to have networking among the colleagues to give and receive necessary timely support, become culturally aware, inspire trust, build personal relationship, educate patients, develop a personal skills and can actively listen.

There is significant difference between the two lists of soft skills proposed by the two (Hariti & Rejeki, 2020). That's the reason in the first set of soft skills the questionnaire aimed at knowing the

awareness of such soft skills and in the second list of skills the questionnaire was to know the role of communication skills in acquiring these soft skills.

Non-verbal communication skill

It is a soft skill that has a major role during the interaction between the nurses and the patients who are not able to communicate orally. Another example of non verbal communication takes place in the operation theatre which is crucial. As they get more experience, non verbal communication for nurses becomes easier however, most of them are not aware of the term.

Active listening

It plays a major role practically in all professions. In the nursing profession it becomes more crucial in many situations. Active listening involves not only concentration but also understanding the language of the person who is communicating. Hence, having excellent communicative skill can help the nursing professionals to be active listeners. Fifty percent of the respondents claim that they are aware of the term active listening but when the researchers asked them to explain the term most of the nursing professionals find it difficult to explain what exactly it is.

Personal relationship

The term personal relationship in nursing profession which is linked with therapeutic relationship which in turn blended with terms like showing a genuine interest, trust, respect and empathy. Empathy is a separate entity and it is one of the soft skills too. Patients reveal themselves and the background of their ailment completely only two nurses who show genuine interest and care. This in turn helps the nurses to give better and needed treatment. Personal relationship involves trust too. Nursing profession becomes successful and interesting if only they have personal relationship which involves real and fruitful communication.

Inspire trust

One of the most needed soft skills is inspiring trust. Sixty percent of our respondents claim that they are aware of it. It does involve communicative skill because until and unless you understand what the patient is communicating you cannot inspire trust. Because you have to reciprocate from what you have understood. In the same way you, as a nursing personal need to communicate effectively in order to convince the patient and thus inspire trust. Therefore, nursing professionals should be keen to inspire trust in order to better patient care.

Show compassion

In order to be a good leader you need to be compassionate. (Maillet & Read, 2021) a regular contributor in Nursing News states clearly that compassion in nursing takes a nurse from competent care that includes the required skills and knowledge to treat the patients to outwardly caring through actions and deeds that involve the emotional aspects of the relationship. It is by showing compassion you become empathetic and make the patients comfortable. Most of the nurses are very much aware of this soft skill and interestingly they also agree that effective communication skill help them to communicate effectively and to show compassion.

Cultural awareness

Wherever interpersonal relationship is involved, cultural awareness becomes significant in order to carry on the relationship. The relationship between nurse and the patient, nurse and her/his colleagues, nurse and her superiors etc. in all these relationship, if you want to build rapport and carry out your task successfully cultural awareness plays a major role. Knowing the culture of the person with whom we are communicating is cultural awareness. Nurses do not always work in ethnic group. They are often exposed to a multicultural environment. Therefore, cultural awareness becomes very important and communicative skill thus plays a major role in having cultural awareness.

Educating patients

As soon as the patient is admitted it is the duty of the nurses to educate the patients and patient-attendees. Educating the patients here means instructing and explaining the patients verbally what to do and what not to do. 95% of the nursing professionals are aware of the importance of

this particular soft skill. Language plays a major role in practicing this soft skill. Therefore it is inevitable that in order to be effective nursing educator one needs to be excellent communicator.

Written communication

Communicative skill involves both written and spoken. Therefore, it is a skill that is the most needed in nursing profession next to speaking. Nurses need to report all their medical proceedings. In the written communication there is a lot to learn. There is a wide range of written communication going on in the nursing field even after the arrival of technology. Instructions, circulars, emails, reports are some of them to name. Fortunately most of the respondents in our survey are aware of the soft skill. However, the nursing professionals need a helping hand even when they write a short report. It has been realized widely the need of giving importance to this skill.

Personal skills

It includes ones behavior in the society, the way we communicate in a prevailing situation and the way we manage the situation. It differs person to person. It shows your individual trait in the context of your workplace. Sixty percent of the respondents are aware of this particular skill which is a good sign. However, the role of communication skill in attaining the needed personal skill is yet to be known. As it is mentioned earlier some people consider the major part of communication skill involves listening and speaking, personal skills are mostly achieved in active listening and effectively explaining ones idea through speaking skills.

Verbal communication

It involves basically interacting or exchanging information orally. It is a matter of choosing the right word and using the right tone. Verbal communication includes both written and spoken words. Therefore, verbal communication can be acquired through proper communication skill. Eighty percent of the respondents claim that they are of the importance of verbal communication. Hardly ten percent state that they are not aware of this particular skill.

Here is the second list of soft skills proposed by [\(Hariti & Rejeki, 2020\)](#). The researchers used this list to find out whether the respondents who are the nursing professionals agree or disagree that communication skill plays an important role in acquiring these soft skills.

Attitude and confidence

Our attitude is based on the confidence that we display. If we want to be confident we need to have strong communication skills. A vast majority of the nurses agree with the idea of the importance of communication skills in acquiring attitude and confidence skills.

Team work

It is a common soft skill in almost all the profession. Around eighty percent of the respondents agree that communication skill is needed in order to practice team work. Team work can only be successful if proper interaction takes place.

Networking

As networking plays a major role in business, among the nursing professionals too it has its own major role to get help and to support each other. Almost eighty percent of the respondents agree that effective communication skill can enhance networking skill.

Critical thinking and creative problem solving

Problems are solved by proper communication. Critical thinking though has to do with mind but it does involve discussion and clarification. There is a difference of opinion among the respondents in agreeing or disagreeing in the role of communication skill in both these skills. However, it is a fact that these soft skills well connected with one another.

Professionalism

A skill that is inter-oven with all the other soft skills. No doubt that it is the outcome of each and every individual's communication skill. In nursing profession it is explicit. Seventy percent of the respondents agree that communication skill has a major role in exercising professionalism.

Empathy

Building a trusting connection with the patients and keeping in mind the patients point of view in order to provide the needed care is called empathy. In other words, understanding the problem of the patients as their own and providing the needed medical help. Sixty percent of the nurses who responded claim that they are aware that communication skill is needed in order to understand the need of the patients and to be empathetic.

Conflict resolution

Lot to discussions, arguments, counter arguments, defending oneself, expressing opinions, agreeing and disagreeing all these are part of conflict resolution. In every profession conflict resolution is there. When an issue arises, it becomes significant especially in nursing profession that they need to give valid reasons. All the respondents unanimously agree that communication skill is needed to be effective and successful in practicing conflict resolution.

Adaptability

Every patient is different, every doctor with whom the nurses work are different and the style of working keeps changing, the technology and the environment keep changing. Therefore it is necessary that the nursing professionals need to adapt themselves. Around fifty-five respondents are aware that communication skill is essential in becoming adaptable.

Initiative and strong work ethic

Nurses who practice initiative are those who can demonstrate themselves and show that they can take necessary action when in need. Less than fifty percent of the nurses agree that communication skill is necessary to practice initiative and strong work ethic.

There is wide range of opinion on the concept of soft skills. Some consider communication skill is itself one of the soft skills and it involves only listening and speaking skills. The question then arises about the written communication. However the vast majority in the nursing profession do agree that communication skill is essential in acquiring the other soft skills.

CONCLUSION

From literature review and from the small-scale study undertaken, healthcare professionals feel the need of promoting effective communication skills which in turn help them to acquire other soft skills. The very nature of the nursing profession is demanding and challenging as it involves lives. It is also noticed clearly that nurses and nursing educators who have received training communication skills especially when they were in nursing training institutes communicate effectively and show increased confidence in not only communicating with patients but also with other stakeholders. We cannot imagine a nurse who has excellent clinical skills but poor soft skills. Awareness of all soft skills is a must. It is also a well-known fact that nurses who have excellent communicative skills broaden their knowledge and experience and are successful in international exams, perform well in interviews and get placement abroad. Finally, it is a fact that soft skills can be learnt from experienced nursing professionals who act as a role model. Nursing schools and colleges are the places where nurses are supposed to become aware of and learn the soft skills.

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