

The Vital Role of Emotional Intelligence in Nursing Practice

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Abstract

Emotional intelligence is a crucial skill that enables nurses to understand and manage their emotions as well as the emotions of others. This article discusses the benefits of Higher emotional Intelligence, importance of Emotional intelligence in nursing practice and the different elements of emotional intelligence and their relevance to Nursing practice. It also explores the way in which nurses can develop their Emotional intelligence skills. This article concludes by emphasizing the need for nurses to prioritize Emotional intelligence in their practice to provide high quality, compassionate care to their patients.

Keywords: EI-Emotional; Intelligence.

INTRODUCTION

Nursing is a profession that requires a high level of Empathy, Compassion and communication skills. Nurses are responsible for caring for patients, and Emotional intelligence plays a crucial role in this process, Emotional intelligence is the ability to understand and manage ones emotions of others. It is an essential skill that Nurses need to possess to provide effective care to their patients. In this article, we will explore the importance of emotional intelligence in the nursing

profession, its impact on patient care, and how nurses can develop their Emotional intelligence skills.

What is Emotion?

The oxford English Dictionary defines emotion as any agitation or disturbance of mind, feelings, passion; any vehement or exited mental state.

According to Daniel Goleman Emotion refers to a feeling and its distinctive thoughts, psychological and biological states and range of propensities to act.

Managing emotions is especially important in situations when we are under pressure.

- ✓ Giving and receiving feedback
- ✓ Meeting tight deadlines
- ✓ Dealing with challenging relationships
- ✓ Not having enough resources
- ✓ Navigating change
- ✓ Working through setbacks and failure

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What is Emotional intelligence?

Emotional intelligence or EI is the ability to understand and manage your own emotions, and those of the people around you. People with a high degree of Emotional intelligence know what they are feeling, what their emotions mean, and how these emotions can affect other People.

The Institute for Health and Human Potential describes Emotional intelligence as "being aware that emotions can drive our behaviour and impact people (positively and negatively), and learning how to manage those emotions both our own and others especially when we are under pressure."

Emotional intelligence is the capacity for recognising our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships

Daniel Goleman

- ✓ Emotional intelligence is the aspect of human intelligence that governs our ability to recognize, understand, control and use of emotions in solving problems of a personal and interpersonal nature (**Bar-On**)
- ✓ EI as the "ability to accurately appraise and express emotions in oneself and others and the use of feelings to motivate, plan and achieve in one's life," (**Salovey & Mayer, 1990**).

Benefits of Higher Emotional Intelligence

- ✓ People with higher emotional intelligence find it easier to form and maintain interpersonal relationships and to 'fit in' to group situations.
- ✓ People with higher emotional intelligence are also better at understanding their own psychological state, which can include managing stress effectively and being less likely to suffer from depression.

Importance of Emotional intelligence in Nursing

Nursing is by nature an emotionally charged profession, with nurses serving at the frontline of healthcare.

The Nursing workplace is a highly stressful environment, with many Nurses managing the emotional events surrounding death and illness in their patients.

In such stressful situations, interpersonal relationships can be affected. There has been increasing concern about aggression in healthcare

settings directed at nurses, primarily from colleagues and supervisors.

EI helps nurses build successful interpersonal relationships, obtain support from others and manage workplace stress.

EI is hypothesized to improve the workplace by allowing individual Nurses to interpret workplace events accurately, decreasing misunderstanding as well as regulating their own emotions.

Emotional intelligence improves communication so that Nurses can cope more effectively with conflict.

Most importantly, when nurses apply emotional intelligence, it leads to a better patient experience Emotional intelligence may be a Nurses most valuable asset to provide high quality of patient care.

Emotional intelligence leads to empathy which plays an important role in establishing patient trust. A major benefit of this trust is that patients may be more likely to adhere to their Nursing care plan which results in better outcome.

Elements of Emotional Intelligence

1. Self-awareness
2. Self-regulation
3. Motivation
4. Empathy
5. Relationship management (social skills)

1. Self-awareness

- Nurses with self-awareness know how they feel at all times and know how their emotions and actions can affect others.
- Being self-aware allows personal growth through the embracement of constructive feedback.
- Authentic self-awareness allows the Nurse to identify personal strengths and weaknesses and to be comfortable with emotional discomfort. For example, a nurse with self-awareness may have different opinions with a colleague, but does not take the differences in opinion personally but rather acknowledges and embraces differences.
- Nurse leaders who have self-awareness have a clear picture of their strengths and weaknesses and behave with humility.

What can you do to improve your self-awareness?

Self-awareness can be developed through objectively evaluating oneself. Writing down one's strengths and weakness, helps oneself become more aware of themselves. Additionally, being willing to listen to colleagues providing honest and constructive feedback will promote personal and professional growth.

Keep a journal: Journals helps to improve your self-awareness. If you spend just a few minutes each day writing down your thought's strengths and weakness, this can move you to a higher degree of self-awareness. Journaling this information along with one's achievements, goals, and plans will allow for self-reflection which fosters self-awareness.

Mindfulness and meditation: allows individuals to be at a place to better self-reflect and focus on self-awareness.

Slow down: When you experience anger or other strong emotions, slow down to examine why. Remember, no matter what the situation, you can always choose how you react to it

Finally, personality tests exist that may help individuals better learn about traits that influence who they are and thus assist Nurses in understanding why they feel and react the way they do personally and professionally.

2. Self-regulation

- Being self-aware allow nurses to be self-regulated, a second trait of emotional intelligence.
- Self-regulated nurses rarely verbally attack others, make rushed or emotional decisions, stereotype people, or compromise their values.
- Self-regulation is all about staying in control. Although nurses find themselves in stressful situations, developing self-regulation will allow stressful situations to not become worse and minimize chaos.
- Self-regulation can be most difficult when interacting with colleagues who do not agree and patients and families who are in denial about their illness/wellness state.
- Nurses who self-regulate listen more than talk. They do not take other's comments personally, but rather puts the statements in context of the situation.
- Self-regulation is not just about verbal restraint but also behaviour surveillance.

When interacting with colleagues, patients, and families.

How can you Improve your Ability to self-Regulate?

- **Know your values:** Do you have a clear idea of where you absolutely will not compromise? Do you know what **values** are most important to you? Spend some time examining your "code of ethics." If you know what's most important to you, then you probably won't have to think twice when you face a moral or ethical decision you'll make the right choice.
- **Hold yourself accountable:** If you tend to blame others when something goes wrong, stop. Make a commitment to admit to your mistakes and to face the consequences, whatever they are. You'll probably sleep better at night, and you'll quickly earn the respect of those around you.
- **Practice being calm:** The next time you're in a challenging situation, be very aware of how you act. Do you relieve your stress by shouting at someone else? Practice deep breathing exercises to calm yourself. Also, try to write down all of the negative things you want to say, and then rip it up and throw it away. Expressing these emotions on paper (and not showing them to anyone!) is better than speaking them aloud to your team. What's more, this helps you challenge your reactions to ensure that they're fair!

It is important to be mindful of body language and the perceptions of others related to our body language. Often nurses are in a hurry due to multiple time sensitive tasks and do not realize how their lack of engagement with others effect the patient care experience. Slowing down, standing still, without hands crossed, making eye contact when dialoguing with others, will facilitate a positive perception of care by nurses. Being self-aware and self-regulating will help others feel cared for.

Self-regulation can be fostered by practicing mindfulness and meditation as noted above, along with identifying stressors in various areas of one's life. Knowing what triggers stress in one's life will help to regulate one's emotions and reactions when those stressors occur. Reflecting on instances when you did not self-regulate through journaling or talking with a mentor can help you to learn and move toward better self-regulation in the future.

Asking questions such as, "Why am I or others feeling angry, frustrated, anxious, with this

situation?" and "Are these emotions in play being directed at the right person or situation and to the right degree?". Reflecting on the answers to these questions can assist in the prevention of repeating the same mistake.

3. Motivation

Motivation is another trait of emotional intelligence.

Motivation refers to the driving force or inner desire that compels a person to take action, pursue a goal or engage in a particular activity. It is the energy that propels us to keep going, despite obstacles or setbacks, and helps us to achieve our goals and aspirations.

Self-motivated leaders work consistently towards their goals, and they have extremely high standards for the quality of their work. People are not motivated by those who lash out, tear down or disempower others through lack of self-regulation.

Not everyone is motivated by the same incentives. Some Nurses will be intrinsically motivated while others will be extrinsically motivated. Taking the time to learn the uniqueness of one's motivation will assist in fostering motivation. Some nurses will set personal goals of achievement (intrinsic), while others are motivated by hearing or receiving positive feedback (extrinsic); however, extrinsic motivation is not sustaining.

Fostering intrinsic motivation in others will sustain motivation. Assisting others in setting realistic goals and affirming the achievement of set goals will help others be motivated and find purpose in their work.

How can you improve your motivation?

- **Re-examine why you're doing your job:** It's easy to forget what you really love about your career. So, take some time to remember why you wanted this job. If you're unhappy in your role and you're struggling to remember why you wanted it, try the **Five Whys** technique to find the root of the problem. Starting at the root often helps you look at your situation in a new way. And make sure that your goal statements are fresh and energizing.
- **Know where you stand:** Determine how motivated you are to lead. If you need to increase your motivation to lead, it directs you to resources that can help.
- **Be hopeful and find something good:** Motivated leaders are usually **optimistic**, no matter what

problems they face. Adopting this mindset might take practice, but it's well worth the effort.

- Every time you face a challenge, or even a failure, try to find at least one good thing about the situation. It might be something small, like a new contact, or something with long-term effects, like an important lesson learned. But there's almost always something positive, if you look for it.

4. Empathy

Empathy is often considered a critical component of emotional intelligence and is essential for building strong healthy relationships with others.

Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another person. It involves being able to put oneself in someone else's shoes and imagine how they might be feeling in a particular situation.

Empathy allows a nurse to put themselves in someone else's situation and be self-regulated. When nurses demonstrate empathy, nurses listen and do not react to emotional outbursts or deficiencies of other people. They are able to work in the context of understanding others in light of what others are experiencing.

Empathy can be expressed in many ways, including active listening offering support and encouragement, showing understanding and compassion, and being sensitive to another person's needs and feelings. It is an essential skill for developing healthy relationships, resolving conflicts, and building trust with others.

Cultivating Empathy can be challenging, but it is a skill that can be developed through practice and self-reflection.

How can you improve your empathy?

Put yourself in someone else's position

Empathy can be developed by intentionally, cognitively putting oneself in another's shoes. For example, asking the other person,

"How do you feel about that?"

What is on your mind?"

To demonstrate true empathy for others one must also ask themselves,

"What am I hearing the person say?"

Why does the person feel this way?"

As the person begins to open up and deeper

understanding is achieved, it is important to offer support.

Nurses often find themselves trying to 'rescue' or 'save' others and thus as nurses practice empathy it is important to be able to detach themselves from the person's experience while being empathetic. If unable to detach oneself, the nurse may find herself/himself with compassion fatigue. Compassion fatigue occurs when nurses become 'closed off' or 'callous' to protect themselves from the pain other's experience by trying to be empathetic. Mindfulness meditation can help foster empathy. By being still, in the moment, allows one to be non-judgmental and accepting of what it is with clarity

Pay attention to body language: Learning to read body language can be a real asset because you'll be better able to determine how someone truly feels. This gives you the opportunity to respond appropriately.

Respond to feelings: Responding to the feelings is an important component of empathy because it shows that you are actively listening and understanding how the other person is feeling. Responding to feelings can take many forms, including verbal response like saying I can understand why you feel that way or that must be really difficult for you. Nonverbal responses like nodding making eye contact.

It is important to remember that responding to someone's feelings does not necessarily mean trying to fix the situation or offer advice. Sometimes all someone needs is to be heard and validated their emotions.

Offering empathy and emotional support can be incredibly powerful in helping someone feel seen, heard and understood.

For leaders, having empathy is critical to managing a successful team or organization. Leaders with empathy have the ability to put themselves in someone else's situation. They help develop the people on their team, challenge others who are acting unfairly, give constructive feedback, and listen to those who need it.

5. Social Skills

The last trait of EI is relationship management or social skills

Social skill is an important component of emotional intelligence because it involves using our emotional awareness to navigate social situations effectively. Social skill encompasses a wide range

of abilities including communication, conflict resolution, teamwork and leadership.

Having strong social skills enables us to build positive relationships with others, resolve conflicts effectively and work collaboratively towards common goals.

Nurses who seek to have good relations with others exhibit EI and provide a canvas for others to feel cared for. Nurses must seek to engage with others, not merely tolerate others. Engagement fosters communication and gives the opportunity to practice self-evaluation and self-regulation.

Often time you will hear people say, '...I just have to work with them, I don't have to like them or socialize with them.' While this may be true on some level.

But in order to give collaborative, patient centred care, one has to have some type of relationship with his/her colleagues and patients. This is where EI comes into play and why it is important for nurses.

Nurses with good relationship management and social skills not only demonstrate EI but also will find greater satisfaction in their work. Likewise, patients, families and colleagues who are exposed to nurses who possess EI will find their experiences much more satisfying. This allows both nurses and patients to flourish in their healthcare experiences. Nurses who intentionally develop their EI will allow their colleagues, patients and families to feel cared for and cared about.

How can you build social skills?

- **Learn conflict Resolution:** Nursing Leaders must know how to resolve conflicts between their team members, customers, or vendors. Learning conflict resolution skills is vital if you want to succeed.
- **Improve your Communication skills:** Communication is the largest and most vital piece of social skills and relationship management. Effective communicators not only place active listening as a priority but also exude warmth when talking with others. Warmth is felt by others when the communicator is friendly, approachable and is kind. In order to exhibit these attributes of warmth, the nurse needs to make sure that the verbal communication and non-verbal communication are parallel. Assuming yourself as 'friendly' and saying the right words, but showing impatience or condescending behaviours while talking, dismisses the receiver from hearing the

friendly words. Likewise, exhibiting warmth in non-verbal behaviours but choosing words that are demeaning, negative, judgmental and/or unkind will dismiss the warm behaviours evident in a conversation.

- **Learn how to praise others:** Nursing leaders can inspire the loyalty of the team members by **giving praise** when it's earned. Learning how to praise others is a fine art, but well worth the effort.

CONCLUSION

Working on your emotional intelligence could well be the most important aspects of your personal development.

Research has shown that people with higher level of emotional intelligence enjoy more satisfying and successful careers and relationships.

If you think about ways to enhance your

emotional intelligence you are likely to become more charismatic, interesting and attractive to others and will give your self-esteem a boost.

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