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Miscommunication and Healthcare Errors

Experiment 5 - Practical Notes

Name: _____ Roll no.: _____ Date: _____

Aim

To identify an ambiguous message and demonstrate clarification, read-back and confirmation before action.

Principle

Communication errors can arise from unclear identity, incomplete instructions, abbreviations or unconfirmed verbal messages. Closed-loop communication requires the receiver to repeat the key message and the sender to confirm or correct it. An unresolved ambiguity is a reason to clarify, not to guess.

Practice Case

Fictional simulation: A fictional ward message says, "Send the evening pack for bed six." Two people have recently changed beds, and the message contains no patient identifier or verified medicine order. No dose decision is to be made.

Roles and Scoring

Work in a group of three: learner, patient or partner, and observer. Score each criterion 0 = not demonstrated, 1 = partly demonstrated, 2 = clearly demonstrated. The checklist is for classroom feedback, not a validated clinical assessment.

Requirements

- Case sheet, quiet practice space and timer.
- Observer checklist and notebook; no real patient details.

Procedure

1. Identify gaps

List the missing identity, authorised order and delivery details. Separate a location such as bed number from a patient identifier.

2. Pause the action

Do not prepare or deliver a medicine based on the ambiguous message. Contact the authorised sender.

3. Clarify

Ask for the required identifiers and the existing verified order through the approved system.

4. Check back

Repeat the complete non-ambiguous instruction. Ask the sender to confirm it and correct any mismatch.

5. Document and improve

Record the fictional error pathway and propose a prevention step, such as a standard message format and confirmation process.

Healthcare Psychology and Communication Skills

Suggested Practice Dialogue

- Receiver: "The bed number alone does not identify the person. Please confirm the required identifiers and the verified order."
- Receiver: "I will send the labelled pack for the verified patient through the approved delivery process. Is that correct?"
- Sender: "Correct. Use the verified order and identifiers; do not rely on the bed number."

Observations and Record

Criterion	Score 0 / 1 / 2	Observed behaviour
Identifies missing information	—	—
Pauses before unsafe action	—	—
Uses a complete check-back	—	—
Proposes a specific prevention step	—	—

Worked Example

The numbers below are illustrative; enter your own observations in the record.

- Illustrative scores: 2 + 2 + 1 + 2 = 7/8. Improvement: repeat the entire clarified instruction, not only the delivery location.

Result

Total score: ____ / 8. Record one effective phrase, one missed opportunity and one specific action for the next attempt.

Precautions

- Do not invent a dose or drug to make an ambiguous instruction complete.
- Use approved patient-identification and medicine-order procedures.
- Analyse system factors as well as individual behaviour; avoid blame-only discussion.

Viva Questions and Answers

1. Why is a bed number insufficient?

A location can change and does not uniquely establish identity.

2. What completes a communication loop?

The sender confirms or corrects the receiver's repeated message.

3. What should happen when information remains unclear?

Pause the action and seek clarification through the authorised channel.

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