

ABC of time planning

Being able to prioritise and delegate are essential skills for nurses. Bethann Siviter offers some tips

A S A NURSE, you will have many people competing for your time and attention. Things change quickly in healthcare environments, so it is important to be flexible. Determining priorities, which things must be done right away and which can wait, is critical in maintaining your equilibrium.

Work out a system where you get the most important things done first and you know how much there is left to do. You also need to work out what could be delegated to others.

The ABCD system is an excellent way to organise and prioritise your tasks:

A: Absolutely must get done

- Tasks that must be done at a certain time.
- You will be interrupted to do a particular task if it is not done soon.
- Others need it done to do their job.
- Waiting will cause a patient or his or her family avoidable distress.
- A risk or hazard is present.
- Most documentation and paperwork.

B: Better sooner than later

- Can wait, but not too long.
- Must be done today or on this shift.
- Will save time and resources if done soon.

C: Can wait until later

- Things that do not have any time frame attached.
- Getting things that will be needed later in the day.
- Some paperwork.

D: Do not worry about it

- These are tasks that are beneficial, but if left undone will not affect patients or their care.
- These things should get done, but no one will be hurt if they are not.

When you write down tasks or things your patient needs, rate them A, B, C or D. Get all the As done as soon as possible, or at their scheduled times. Sometimes you can combine tasks without costing extra time. For example, while toileting patients (A), you might wash them as well (B). Make sure that tasks which could cause interruptions or delay other people are done first whenever possible.

As new tasks arise, decide where to put them on your list. Tasks will sometimes change in priority. If a patient vomits on the sheets, for example, changing the linen goes from a C to an A. Some tasks can be avoided simply by being considerate and cleaning up after yourself.

It is often difficult for nursing students to delegate tasks, but it is an essential skill. To delegate safely and appropriately, you have to consider a number of points:

- What tasks must a nurse do by law and what must be done because it is trust policy?
- If a particular task is delegated and things go pear-shaped, how bad could it be?
- Does the person to whom you are delegating have the knowledge and skill to complete the delegated tasks?
- What is best for the patient?
- Are you being lazy by delegating?
- Will it be done in time if delegated?



Andy White

Communication is key. Make certain that the other person understands exactly what you need and when you need it done.

Delegation and time management are essential for developing professional nursing practice. With practice you will find they get easier and make your working day go more smoothly. They also give you the time you need to give the best possible care. ☺

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Stressed out

Learning to cope with stress is a useful skill for your nursing career and life ahead, says Bethann Siviter

YOUR NURSE education is demanding and can be especially stressful during exams, assignment submissions and assessment deadlines, around placement schedules and when dealing with difficult or needy people.

You need to set priorities to juggle all this successfully. Make a list of all the things you already do. Are there things that you could pass on to someone else or put on hold? If there are, you can catch up with them later.

Your social life will suffer. Let the people who care about know that if they do not hear from you, it is not personal. It is just that you are busy and putting all your energy into your course.

Other ways of coping with stress might sound like they waste time, but they increase your ability to think and to concentrate, so you should see them as an investment. Exercise, eating a balanced diet, getting plenty of sleep and spending quality time with friends and family are necessary ingredients for managing stress.

You need to be organised. Get a good diary, and write down all the important university and family dates and deadlines. Plan to meet each deadline in advance. Make appointments for tutorials early and get library books before others are looking for them. Nothing is more soul destroying than having to cram at the last minute. Your grades will be better if you

give yourself plenty of time to do your work. Part of being organised also means getting everyone else organised. Make sure everyone knows what their responsibilities are.

As soon as you recognise that you are stressed, you need to act. Go back to your 'to do list'. Are you taking on too much? Where can you cut back? Talk to family and friends, your tutor or mentor. Take care of yourself. If the stress is overwhelming, visit the occupational health department or see your GP.

Learning to cope with stress is a useful skill for your nursing career and life ahead. By setting priorities, planning ahead and by organising yourself, you can minimise the impact of stress.

You will not be able to take care of other people if you are not taking care of yourself. ☺

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