

Spring 2019 Issue

“When you are a nurse you know that every day you will touch a life... and a life will touch yours.”



Spring 2019 Nurse's Newsletter

The spring edition of KEPRO's Health Care Quality Unit (HCQU) Nursing Edition newsletter continues to provide information on how nurses can work side by side to educate caregivers about providing quality care to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). This newsletter examines the nurse's role in setting an example for caregivers regarding positive communication and best practices for safe care.

Nurses and direct caregivers are the backbone of agencies that support people with I/DD. The primary responsibility of both is the same: to provide conscientious, person-centered care in a safe and healthy environment. Most caregivers have a direct supervisor who oversees and manages the day-to-day activities, ensures adequate staffing, and acts as a role model for caregivers by displaying a positive attitude, thoughtful care, and a strong work ethic. Currently, nurses in provider agencies may be asked to be a role model, due to frequent turnover among caregivers and supervisors. Providing respectful, attentive care is one of the reasons a person accepts the job of a caregiver; however, some people may need assistance understanding the specialized care required for supporting people with I/DD.

Actions Speak Louder Than Words

When starting a new position, people often learn best by observing how others perform the job. Nurses can take the opportunity to model respect for and attentiveness to the needs of people with I/DD. Below are some points to ponder.

Actions Speak Louder Than Words: Toward Individuals with I/DD

A nurse's actions and attitudes toward people with I/DD speak volumes from which others can learn. For example:

- **When speaking with an individual, position yourself at eye level with the person and maintain eye contact.** Often, this is easier said than done amidst the bustle of job responsibilities. However, demonstrating respect and care about what the person is communicating is worth the few minutes it takes.
- **Use respectful language and a kind tone of voice.** Speak with adults in an adult manner, avoiding childish wording and demanding/authoritative tones.
- **Follow up and fulfill promises.** If the person was told a certain action would be taken, be sure to follow through with the action.
- **Demonstrate effective methods for conflict resolution.** Show caregivers how to resolve conflict effectively and avoid power struggles.

The KEPRO HCQU's Communication: Positive Techniques online training has excellent information about effective communication with people with I/DD. To access this training, visit our website at <https://hcqu.kepro.com/>. Click on the Training tab, then select the Online Training Registration link in the left-side menu. If needed, an instructor-led training may be requested.

Actions Speak Louder Than Words: Toward Caregivers

A nurse's actions towards caregivers can demonstrate professionalism and communicate the need to work as a team to provide quality care to people with I/DD.

- **Encourage communication between nurse(s) and caregivers.** In most instances, caregivers have a more in-depth knowledge about the individuals in their care than do nurses. A positive relationship with a person's caregivers enables a nurse to provide more effective health care. Make an effort to speak with each caregiver, ask questions, and encourage open communication about observations and concerns.
- **Take caregiver concerns seriously; listen and ask questions.** If contacted by a caregiver about a concern, ask questions and provide appropriate follow-up care. When caregivers feel dismissed or not taken seriously, they might stop communicating their observations and concerns.
- **If time allows, review caregiver documentation.** Nurses are educated on techniques for effective and accurate documentation. If an incident occurs, and time allows, review caregiver documentation of the incident and offer suggestions, as needed, and compliments for what is done well.
- **Be dependable.** Nurses who show up on time for meetings and respond promptly to calls from caregivers demonstrates dependability and respect for the importance of the caregiver's time.

Demonstrate a Healthy Lifestyle

Reports show that many people with I/DD are overweight or obese and do not engage in exercise. Demonstrating a healthy lifestyle is a “silent tool” nurses can use to be positive role models to caregivers and people they support.

- **Bring healthy meals and snacks to work.** This sends a quiet message that eating healthy is important to you. Save the candy bar for your ride home.
- **Do not smoke in the presence of a person with I/DD.** It is your right to smoke in a designated area at work; however, doing so communicates the message that smoking is acceptable. Abstaining from smoking at work might encourage caregivers not to smoke in the presence of individuals.

Encourage Safe Practices

As teaching moments arise, take the opportunity to educate caregivers about safe practices and privacy. Even though caregivers receive instruction on these matters upon hire, it is helpful to remind them of the importance of addressing safety concerns.

- **Observe the environment for safety concerns and communicate those concerns with caregivers.** Some examples are:
 - Throw rugs bunched or slipping around easily on floor
 - Wet areas on floor
 - Clutter on floor or steps
 - Inadequate lighting
 - Opportunities for adaptive equipment that might be beneficial for individuals, such as a shower chair, grab bars in the bathroom, or a nightlight in the bedroom
 - Loud music

The first five concerns listed above increase the risk for falls. Loud music might prevent caregivers from hearing calls for help if a fall occurs.

- **Observe individuals and caregivers during meals.**

Safety during meals is a serious concern, as choking has been identified as one of the fatal four conditions leading to preventable deaths. If you are at the house during meals, quickly scan the tables to ensure the safety of individuals.

 - Verify that correct consistency of foods and fluids are served.
 - Observe that adaptive utensils are being used.
 - Ensure individuals are positioned properly for safe swallowing.
 - Ensure caregivers are in close proximity during meals.
 - A caregiver must be seated next to a person who has dysphagia.
 - Encourage caregivers to sit next to a person to assist with feeding, not standing at the person’s side.
 - Encourage caregivers assisting with feeding to inform the person that food is ready on the spoon or fork, instead of poking the utensil at the person’s lips. This is important when administering medications also.
 - TV should be off, to minimize distraction.
 - Music, if played, should be relaxing and at a low volume.
 - Loud music might prevent caregivers from hearing a person who is choking or needs assistance.

Encourage Dignity and Privacy

Some people with I/DD may not appear to be aware of privacy violations; however, every person deserves privacy and dignity.

- If the bedroom or bathroom doors are open during dressing or bathing, quietly shut the door and speak to the caregiver afterward about the importance for privacy.
- Avoid talking about a person in front of him or her. Take caregivers aside, as needed, to avoid discussing their concerns in the person's presence.
- Avoid talking about individuals in front of each other. Leave the area to speak privately.

Caregivers may need a reminder that their workplace is the person's home. Loud and/or offensive music has no place in the home unless chosen by an individual and agreeable to others living in the home. TV shows and movies with violence, foul language, and/or explicit sex scenes should be avoided unless everyone in the house is amenable.

Nurses are in position to look for the positive actions caregivers perform to make the lives of people in their care healthier and happier. Compliments on the thoughtful, attentive care provided help caregivers feel appreciated in the workplace. Take time to remind caregivers they are valued and are providing people with I/DD opportunities for a better life. Employees who know they are valued provide better care, which is the overall goal!

Reference:

West Virginia Bureau of Senior Services. (n.d.). Direct care worker guide.
Retrieved from <http://www.wvseniorservices.gov/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=7u9cjlCs731%3D&tabid=92>



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