The nurse must learn how to perform action in caring for her/his patients in an efficient manner. Stated below are some guidelines for managing your time.

I. WHEN PERFORMING A CRITICAL SKILL

   a. Collect all the material needed before starting
   b. Anticipate any complications which would indicate additional supplies that should be ready if needed.
   c. Arrange material for quick and easy use (for example: use a rolling cart if possible).
   d. Complete a critical skill without interruption (except in an emergency).
   e. If possible, perform those skills which may result in soiling the patient or his bed before he is bathed and his linen changed (for example: dressing changes, discontinuing either a Foley or IV)
   f. If possible, postpone performing activities which can be done more quickly and easily at a later time (for example: Mrs. J. weighs 300 lbs. and is helpless. She is going to x-ray at 10:30. Wait until she leaves to change her bed unless it is wet.

II. SAVE TIME SPENT WALKING

   a. Never make two or three trips when one trip can combine the tasks.
   b. Before leaving the medicine room or service area on the way to the patient’s room, check to see if there is something else that could be taken which the patient needs or wants.
   c. Check a patient’s room before leaving to see if there is anything that needs to be removed or that you can bring back later.
   d. Anticipate the patient’s need in the immediate future and meet them before leaving the room (for example: seeing that his drinking water is handy; asking if he wants something to read).

III. COMBINE ACTIVITIES

   a. Plan work to combine similar tasks when possible (for example: pouring medications for more than one patient at a time if scheduled at the same time).
   b. Combine nursing actions whenever possible (for example: assessing the patient’s condition, meeting his social needs, providing personal hygiene, and meeting activity needs could be combined while giving a patient a complete bath with range of motion exercise.

Essential to the organization and planning of work is the knowledge of the amount of time it takes to perform certain tasks. How long does it take you to give a complete bed bath with no interruptions or complications? You never really timed yourself? Well, start doing it right this week. How much time does it take to walk from the nurses’ station at your hospital to your patient’s room? How much time did it take you to prepare, give, and chart that one intramuscular injection or pain medication? How much time do you really spend in the hospital just socially chatting with hospital personnel? Never gave it a thought? Add it up one day at work – you may be surprised!

Obviously, there are many factors which affect the time element. For example, a certain critical skill may be performed in two minutes by an experienced nurse, but complications may arise that prolong the performance to 15 minutes. But, the fact remains that there are indeed certain amounts of time that reflect reasonable efficiency in the performance of common nursing critical skills. All of you know by now that three hours to give on bed bath (and nothing else) is a very long time indeed! Notice and watch how long it takes an experienced nurse to perform various tasks. Shorter than you? This is not surprising. But you now have a goal for yourself – to achieve her time or better.
IV. SETTING PRIORITIES AND PLANNING PATIENT CARE

You learned, when you studied Nursing Process, how to form a Nursing Care Plan for your patient. The plan incorporates all the nursing actions you have identified as being essential for optimum patient care.

However, nurses need to go one step further. They must plan what they are going to do for a patient in relation to *TIME*. Most nurses find that unless they make some kind of written list or worksheet for themselves, they may forget certain tasks. This is even more true when a nurse is assigned the care of several patients, which of course is the usual situation in a hospital today. There are probably as many worksheet forms as there are nurses. What serves well for one nurse might be a nuisance to another. The important point about a worksheet is that it is a tool for the individual nurse to help her organize her total work for the day in an efficient manner. When planning her activities for the day, the nurse must keep many things in mind such as the care plan of her individual patient or patients, her priorities as well as the following considerations:

a. All activities the nurse will be doing must be considered in planning. For example, “lunch time” and charting.
b. A plan for the day must be flexible. Patient’s conditions change. There is always the “unexpected” that may occur.
c. The “floor routine” affects the nurse’s plan for her daily work. For example, in a particular nursing unit, all nurses may be expected to help pass the meal trays or chart TPRs immediately after taking them in the morning.
d. Written and unwritten policies of the hospital will affect the nurse’s work plan. For example, it may be the policy that all patients are given a complete bed bath daily even if they are perfectly capable of taking a shower of bathing themselves in bed.
e. When a nurse is assigned the care of several patients, she must plan her work so that all her patients receive attention from her, but not necessarily for the same amounts of time. She must plan so that she is not so completely involved with the care of one patient for one, two, or three hours that the remaining patients are neglected. On a later page is an example of a student’s time management worksheet. It is prepared the night before clinical. Additions and deletions are made during the day as indicated by doctor’s orders, changes in the patient’s condition and other factors.

Summary

The experienced nurse knows how to use her time for maximum benefit to the patients. She knows how to work efficiently, to use time wisely, to set priorities, and to plan her daily work. Diligent application of the knowledge gained from utilizing this material will have nurses saying about you, “She/He is a very competent and able nurse.” A work organization packet is also available at the Learning Resource Center for those students needing further assistance with time management.

1. Oncoming nurses need to avoid unnecessary questions and conversations.
2. Record report or be ready to give an oral report stat after narcotics count is complete.
3. Organize your thoughts and give a brief report. Lengthy reports result in boredom and chit chat.