

Book Review

"Communication skills in health and social care"* and "Communication in nursing and healthcare: A guide for compassionate practice"***

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Communication is a complex phenomenon and also a crucial skill for health professionals. Even though most practitioners know how important communication is, they have hard time operationalizing the theoretical concepts into practice. Bernard Moss (2017) and Gault et al. (2017) presented their books on health communication as means to help health care practitioners in performing effective and in-depth communication with their patients and fellow care providers.

To start it off, each section in Bernard Moss' book includes definitions of core communication skills in various discursive

* Moss, B. (2017). *Communication skills in health and social care* (4th ed.). London, UK: Sage.

** Gault, I., Shapcott, J., Luthi, A., & Reid, G (2017). *Communication in nursing and healthcare: A guide for compassionate practice* (1st ed.). London, UK: Sage.

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contexts. The book also contains ample examples to illustrate how the communication skills can be applied in actual care settings. In addition to the definitions and examples, each section offers individual or group-based activities related to the skills, which could serve as discussion starters or scripts for simulation exercises. Furthermore, the book allows healthcare professionals to find specific topics easily by systematically indexing the communication skills in the alphabetical order. All of these features are designed to enhance care providers' self-confidence in handling real-life situations in health care settings that are often complicated and challenging even for highly competent and experienced care providers.

Another virtue of this book is its attention to both patient-provider communication and inter-professional communication. On the patient-provider communication side, most pages are dedicated to these foundational skills: *acceptance, active listening, advising, advocacy, breaking bad news, challenging, empathy, endings, feedback, loss etc.* At the same time, the author also expanded the communication toolbox of care providers by including more advanced techniques such as *ecomaps, genograms, and labyrinths* to stimulate communication with patients. For example, *labyrinth* is a technique that care providers can use to induce patients to focus their minds by eliminating worries that only distract them and thus disrupt clear communication. On the inter-professional communication side, the following skills are offered to care providers: *inter-professional collaboration, chairing meetings, establishing a professional relationship, using professional capabilities assessment tool (framework), and talks and presentation.*

Furthermore, the author enhanced the value of his book by including alternative communication methods enabled by the development of information technology. In today's work environment, health care professionals need to be proficient in

using a wide range of information technologies such as smartphone, computer, social media, and other computerized systems to function properly. Using telephone, text messaging, and e-mail to communicate with patients is different from solely depending on face-to-face communication. Therefore, the author recommends an appropriate protocol for good *netiquette* or *mobile etiquette* for effective communication and offers some advice.

Overall, this book can be a handy guide for all practitioners seeking better ways to communicate with other stakeholders in healthcare settings. As the author suggests, care providers can use the tips illustrated in the book to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of their communication with patients and fellow care providers, whether face-to-face or via technology. For all its merits, though, I do have one suggestion for author and for readers to consider when using the book: The author could have made it clear which communication skills are meant to be used in interactions with patients vis-a-vis peer providers. There are numerous communication skills and yet the contexts of their use were not made immediately clear to readers, which could be confusing to readers. Thus, categorizing the skills into patient-provider communication and inter-professional communication would be more helpful for readers.

As for Gault et al.'s book, it endeavors to highlight the importance of effective communication for nurses, midwives, and any other health professionals as they work in complex healthcare settings to promote patients' physical and emotional well-being and educate them about self-management. Unlike the book by Bernard Moss, this book was written specifically with nursing students in mind and thus focused on communication issues experienced by nurses as they deal with various needs and unique circumstances of patients in their everyday practice.

Therefore, this book took a more encompassing view on health communication by including theoretical backgrounds as well as ethical issues in clinical practice.

Gault and her colleagues' book is composed of three sections. The first section describes theory-based contexts and components of communication. The second section introduces communication strategies for specific patient conditions and contexts such as acute/chronic illnesses, mental disorders, cognitive deficits, dementia, children, middle-aged, older adult and palliative care. The third section covers various ways to maintain compassionate communication, as nursing students transition from the status of trainees to fully qualified professionals.

One notable feature of this book is the emphasis on the connection between the psychological and the physical and the authors accomplished this by paying attention to psychological theories such as Piaget's cognitive theory and Bowlby's attachment theory. Also, this book contains critical thinking exercises to train students' cognitive coping skills. Various vignettes introduced as "student/patient stories" allow readers to understand and apply each communication skill in a concrete health care situation. Furthermore, the second section discusses some of the most difficult communication scenarios nurses encounter in their clinical settings, which helps readers indirectly experience the communication challenges and explore appropriate measures they can take to overcome them together with patients.

Before concluding this review, however, I would like to offer a critique of the two books that other health communication educators might find helpful. While the authors of both books deserve praise for having included practical details that can help health practitioners understand and apply the principles of

effective communication, some critical thinking exercises are still deemed too broad or abstract. Hence, it would be hard for health care practitioners and trainees to engage in the exercises in a meaningful way without further instruction or refinement. In addition, the authors of both books seem to have fallen into the old paradigm of all-knowing providers and passive patients, while trying to offer an extensive knowledge base for health care practitioners to use in everyday healthcare settings. By focusing on equipping nurses and other health practitioners with practical communication skills, the two books purport—whether intended or not—the outdated notion that health practitioners are the depositors of knowledge and wisdom whereas patients and their families are passive recipients of the care and comfort dispensed by the professionals. In reality, today's patients and lay public have unprecedented access to health information and thus their active participation in communication and decision-making processes in health care should be recognized and further exploited for the benefit of both providers and patients. Between the two books, Bernard Moss' book touches on the use of social media by health practitioners whereas Gault et al. fail to do so. At the same time, Moss's contribution could have been more meaningful, had he provided practical and tangible advice on social media use by health practitioners instead of merely dwelling on the ethical implications. Further comparison of the two books reveals that, while they both contain a wide range of information for healthcare professionals, Gault and her colleagues went an extra mile by showcasing what communication with each category of healthcare seekers (e.g. adolescents, seniors, people with disabilities, etc.) should look like.

In a nutshell, the two books are highly recommended to students and practitioners who need to learn how to best

communicate with patients and their peer providers. They need to know about their own values and learn about patients' experiences and perspectives before they become competent in communicating with patients and their families. Both books not only teach practical skills, but also train them in reflective thinking and raise awareness of their own personal attitudes, feeling, belief, and values. As communication scholars know it all too well, good communication stems from a sound mindset, not from a highly polished skill set.

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