

Importance of Proper Communication in Pandemics: A Reflection of COMM700

Shanza Farzana Zafar¹

¹ Michener Institute of Education at UHN, Toronto, ON Canada

E-mail: 18tsfz1@michener.ca

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Abstract

Before starting the simulation semester of Summer 2020, numerous programs at the Michener Institute had to fulfill the requirements of COM700: Entry to Practice Communication. We attended insightful lectures from amazing speakers on topics ranging from the importance of enhancing communication skills to learning how to react appropriately to a variety of different situations. It has proved extremely beneficial as we move into simulations across different programs and we are continually putting to use what we learned from that course, from talking to fellow healthcare workers, patients, and their families. We watched simulations taking place in hospitals to participating in simulations with standardized patients ourselves and applying those essential skills. This article is a reflection of how the one-week course has advanced our understanding of basic yet critical communication platforms to promote togetherness and empathy as well as progressed the level of care that we want to achieve for our patients.

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Reflection

From learning to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic to learning about communication and its essential skills, to understanding the different ways we can react to someone's comment and how to give feedback, it was a packed week of learning. Everything we learned can prove useful in my practice of respiratory therapy. For example, learning to adapt to these changing times while maintaining physical, emotional and mental health can be a challenge. It can be tough as the rapid learning must become routine as fast as possible and that can take a toll on many aspects of one's life. Like Jaqueline Wilcox, a respiratory therapist who graduated 5 weeks early as the demand for respiratory therapists increased and got pulled into the workforce, many will likely find their workplaces to be drastically different from what they have practiced in some of their courses while in school. As she says, "there will be a second learning curve once things go back to normal because we're not doing a lot of the procedures we would normally be doing" [1].

While pandemics and guidelines around them are not an everyday thing, communication skills are an essential part of one's personal life, workplace as well as on virtual platforms. It is not just the use of verbal words, but body language, facial expressions and tone of voice that all play into communication. To be able to communicate well, we need to keep all of the above in check. To demonstrate the importance of communication, we watched the videos of one nurse and how she communicates in two different ways to change the direction of the conversation itself. While in the first video she begins to take the comments from a patient's family personally and responds as so, the situation escalates into anger, frustration and creates differences [2]. The same nurse, in the second video shows compassion, understanding through her choice of words, her body language and attempts to understand the next person, which not only steers the conversation away from a conflict, it also creates a platform of compassion, togetherness and empathy [3].

Just as communicating and getting our message across is important, it is also important to learn from the next person and what they're trying to say. Feedback becomes

essential when we are trying to learn from the next person to not only help in the current situation but also to improve our future attempts at doing the same thing. So, we receive feedback with an open heart and give feedback with honesty and truthfully. This takes me to the interaction we watched with the standardized patients. I learned so much from them and in a safe environment my colleagues were able to demonstrate what will work and what will backfire in situations like that which was presented. Of the communication skills used, understanding the next person's concern for their loved one as well as understanding the frustration and anger directed at you and finding the root of it helped to dissipate the situation. I believe what worked most effectively was empathy, silence, willingness to share their burden and validating their fears/concerns. I learned that it is the unknown of what is to come that causes such situations to arise and while the family of a patient should not be directing their frustration at the healthcare provider, they believe that as healthcare providers, we might have more control over the disease/illness and have the power to change it. In these circumstances, comforting them, showing empathy, listening to them and giving them a chance to speak and open up about their worries proved extremely successful.

While all these great communication skills I learned in the last week are essential and useful, all methods of communication have a time and place. When one is able to understand and differentiate between that time and place, they can handle even the most stressful of situations. I just hope I am able to do that one day and meanwhile, be there for my patients, the family and fellow colleagues.

References

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