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Opinion

The subtle art of history taking in Nursing.

Shruti Shirke

Abstract

History taking is a key component of patient assessment, enabling the delivery of high-quality care. Understanding the complexity and processes involved in history-taking allows nurses to understand patients' problems better. Care priorities can be identified and the most appropriate interventions can be taken. This article discusses that history taking is more about skill and not just about filling Performa, how history taking is a continuous process, and how history taking in nursing is different from history taking by other health care professionals.

Conclusion: History taking in nursing is different from the history taking by other health personnel, data collection is focused on only one aspect patient, likewise for physicians it is only medical or surgical history. For dieticians; they are focused on body type disease and eating choices etc. but for Nurses; history taking is the combination of overall physical and mental health, patient's comfort, and finding the individual normal which can be abnormal for other patients. To reach this level of competence, Sound interaction with the patients and their relatives as well as all the health care personnel is necessary

Keywords : Nursing, Nursing skill, History taking, Health History.

INTRODUCTION

The Nursing profession is defined by the American Nurses Association as "the protection, promotion, and optimization of health and abilities, prevention of illness and injury, facilitation of healing, alleviation of suffering through the diagnosis and treatment of human response, and advocacy in the care of individuals, families, groups, communities, and populations." [1] In simple words nurses treat human responses to health problems and life processes. Nurses look at each person's individuality, their holistic and spiritual belief system, emotional response, and physical health needs. To fulfill this given definition of nursing, a professional nurse needs to have a thorough history of the person. A health history is a part of the assessment phase of the nursing process. It consists of using directed, focused interview questions and open-ended questions to obtain symptoms and perceptions from the patient about their, illnesses, functioning, and life processes.[2] Nursing is a profession where person is directly connected to the nurse, as they are the primary caregiver and spend much of the time with patients, they get much time for trust building and conversations.

AIMS AND PRINCIPLES OF HISTORY TAKING

Aims of history taking in nursing is not focused on diagnosing the disease condition but to understand patient response to the illness and its contributing factors thus to find out medical and humanistic solution to the discomfort.

The aim of history taking in nursing is to gather comprehensive information about a patient's health status to guide clinical decision-making and care planning. Specifically, it helps nurses to:

1. Understand the patient's health condition: Identify symptoms, their onset, duration, and impact on the patient's life.
2. Identify risk factors: Determine any potential risk factors such as lifestyle, family history, or environmental exposures that could impact health.
3. Facilitate diagnosis: Provide a detailed background for physicians and other healthcare professionals to assist in diagnosing medical conditions.
4. Plan personalized care: Tailor nursing care and interventions to meet the patient's specific needs and preferences.
5. Monitor progression: Track changes in the patient's condition over time to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions.
6. Build rapport and trust: Create a therapeutic relationship with the patient through active listening and empathy, which can enhance cooperation and communication.
7. Ensure holistic care: Understand the patient's physical,

***Corresponding Author:** Dr. Shruti shirke , Dept. of Neuroscience Nursing, All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India. **E-mail:** shrutishirke1410@gmail.com

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psychological, social, and spiritual needs for well-rounded, patient-centered care.

History taking is not bound by rigid principles, but there are certain basic and simple principles to follow that affect history taking in a positive way, some of these principles are as follows; introducing yourself, asking open-ended questions, allowing the patient to elaborate, avoid interruption, listen and observe for clues.[3]

1. Introduction and Rapport Building: Begin by introducing yourself, addressing the patient by name, and establishing a comfortable and respectful environment.
2. Open-Ended Questions: Start with broad questions to allow the patient to express their concerns in their own words, such as "What brings you in today?"
3. Active Listening: Focus on the patient's words and body language, avoiding interruptions to encourage them to share more.
4. Chief Complaint: Identify the main reason the patient sought medical attention, which could be a symptom or concern.
5. Summarization: Recap the information gathered to confirm accuracy and ensure nothing important is missed.
6. Confidentiality and Empathy: Maintain patient confidentiality throughout the process, and show empathy to build trust.
7. Cultural Sensitivity: Be aware of cultural differences that might affect communication and history taking.

Following these principles ensures a comprehensive and patient-centered approach to history taking.

COMPONENTS OF HISTORY TAKING

History taking is not just about asking, it is mostly about interpretation as well and is typically done on admission during the initial visit, which is mostly only disease-oriented. But gradually throughout the patient's stay in-depth history is collected from the patient to develop a comprehensive care plan for the patient. In nursing, history taking is a continuous process, every day when nurses interact with patients get data that helps them to formulate health care plans. The purpose of taking history is to gather subjective data from the patient and their relatives to collaboratively create a nursing care plan that will enhance patient comfort and recovery. [4,5]

A comprehensive health history investigates several areas including the reason to visit the health care facility, disease-oriented history: onset, detailed symptoms, duration, aggravating and relieving factors, and current and past medical history. Demographic data, biological data, Personal history, and family health history. Each of these components is extended based on patients' comfort and relevance.[6]

The components of history taking in nursing are structured to gather a comprehensive view of the patient's health and well-being. These include:

1. Biographical Information

Name, age, gender, and contact information, occupation, marital status, and cultural background.

2. Chief Complaint (Presenting Problem)

The primary reason the patient is seeking care, described in their own words. This can be a symptom, issue, or concern.

3. History of Present Illness (HPI)

Use the "OLDCARTS" approach:
Onset: When did the symptom start?
Location: Where is it located?
Duration: How long has it been present?
Character: Describe the nature (sharp, dull, etc.).
Aggravating/Alleviating factors: What makes it worse or better?
Radiation: Does it spread to other areas?
Timing: Is it constant or intermittent?
Severity: How bad is it on a scale of 1 to 10?

4. Past Medical History

Previous illnesses (e.g., diabetes, hypertension). Surgeries, hospitalizations, and injuries. Allergies (medications, food, environmental). Current medications (including over-the-counter and herbal supplements).

5. Family History

Health conditions in immediate family members (genetic or hereditary risks). Significant illnesses like cancer, heart disease, or diabetes.

6. Social History

Lifestyle factors such as smoking, alcohol, drug use, exercise, diet. Living conditions, occupational health risks, and social support. Stress levels, mental health status, and coping mechanisms.

7. Review of Systems (ROS)

Systematic review of symptoms related to all body systems (e.g., cardiovascular, respiratory, gastrointestinal). Helps identify issues that may not have been initially mentioned.

8. Functional Assessment

Ability to perform activities of daily living (ADLs) such as dressing, bathing, eating. Mobility and independence level.

9. Psychosocial History

Mental and emotional well-being, support systems, relationships, and spirituality.

10. Health Maintenance and Immunization Status

Preventive measures like immunizations, screenings (e.g., mammograms, colonoscopies). Adherence to preventive health recommendations.

11. Patient Expectations and Goals

Understanding the patient's expectations of care and their personal health goals.

This holistic approach ensures that nurses gather critical information to guide individualized care and improve health outcomes.

DISCUSSION

Skill of history taking: A health history is a part of the assessment phase in the nursing process; it consists of using open-ended questions to obtain symptoms and perceptions from the patient about their illnesses, functioning, and life processes. History taking can be guided by standardized Performa like Nursing skills; general survey assessment, ANA; History taking Performa, etc. but moreover history taking is not a Performa to fill but a skill to develop because health history can vary from one person to another. To develop the skill of history taking nurses should be sound in knowledge about disease processes, and human psychology and possess the quality to carry out effective verbal and nonverbal communication techniques. [7,8]

History taking; a continuous process: There are several clues as to why history taking is a continuous process in nursing, and to understand that, we need to know the purpose of history taking; to develop rapport, to describe adaptive and maladaptive behavior, to identify and formulate priorities, to predict the probable response, to analyze the patient perception expectations and deliver care to the patients. Thus, in the Indian setup up where we follow the total patient care nursing model, where care is divided into three shifts, history-taking becomes continuous based on patients' needs. Patients' priority needs change each day during hospitalization and the nurse is bound to identify that each time hence asking questions and formulating a care plan becomes crucial every time throughout the patient's stay. For example, during a long period of hospital stay, if a patient's relatives are unable to buy certain medicines, then the associated nurse needs to reevaluate the patients' and relatives' economic well-being and other related things and plan accordingly. [9,10]

How history taking is different among doctors vs. nurses: History taking is one of the quest tools for health care personnel to spot discomfort and disease in patients, for doctors; it is habitually disease-oriented, specific, carried out in the beginning, and is more focused. Whereas, among nurses, history taking is continuous throughout the patient stay, generalized, comprehensive human-oriented and mostly to rule out physical and mental discomfort. [11]

CONCLUSION

History taking in nursing is different from the history taking by other health personnel, data collection is focused on only one aspect patient, and likewise, for physicians it is only medical or surgical history. For dieticians; they are focused on body type disease and eating choices etc. but for Nurses; history taking is the combination of overall physical and mental health, patient comfort, and finding the individual normal which can be abnormal for other patients. To reach this level of competence, Sound interaction with the patients and their relatives as well as all the health care personnel is necessary.

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