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new project or something they want to accomplish within the facility, ask to have a role in project leadership or to assist a team member in training to help improve your own critical thinking skills. Another great way to hone critical thinking skills as a nurse is to think about previous experiences you have had. Your decisions during those times influenced patient outcomes or relationships. Nurses often work in fast-paced environments where they must care for several patients. Each day, nurses must know what tasks, assessments, or patient concerns need to be addressed. Critical thinking measures help nurses determine which tasks are of higher priority so they can establish a plan of action for their day. Because the clinical environment may change quickly, nurses must remember to remain flexible even after an initial plan or priority checklist is made. Critical thinking nurses cultivate an attitude of confidence when making decisions about patient care. Keep in mind there is a difference between being confident and being conceited. Critical thinkers believed using well-reasoned reasoning will lead to reliable conclusions which improve patient outcomes. Nurses who are critical thinkers may value tradition in nursing practice, but they are also comfortable examining those traditions to ensure their validity and relevance in patient care today. Curious nurses ask questions including, "What would happen if we used a different approach to wound care?" "Would something else be more effective in improving patient outcomes?" or "How does this protocol align with the patient's needs at this time?" Using critical thinking skills as a nurse requires a willingness to make impartial judgments by addressing the viewpoint of everyone involved in patient care. Being fair-minded means considering the thoughts and beliefs of the patient, family, and interdisciplinary team and demonstrating efforts to integrate change when improved patient outcomes are a possibility. It is impossible for one person to know everything about a patient, illness, or treatment. Nurses who practice intellectual humility are willing to admit what they do not know and accept instruction from more experienced nurses or staff. Intellectual humility is a characteristic of critical thinking in nursing that occurs when nurses accept knowing what everyone believes to be the right approach may not always be right or the best approach to patient care as new treatments and evidence emerge. Nurses who demonstrate critical thinking understand the importance of continuous learning. If you want to improve your critical thinking skills in nursing, take advantage of every opportunity to ask questions, learn new skills, and implement knowledge into daily practice. Critical thinking in nursing is essential to promote positive patient outcomes and build strong healthcare teams. Weak critical thinking skills can manifest in various ways, including inaction when action is needed, poor decision-making, and disinterest on the part of nurses. The consequences of poor critical thinking skills in nursing are far-reaching. The following are a few examples of how a lack of critical thinking skills can impact healthcare. Patients rely on nurses to make important decisions about their care. When nurses fail to use critical thinking skills or have not developed strong critical thinking skills, the risk that patients will lack adequate, high-quality care increases. Nurses are trained to use practice methods that include assessment, diagnosis, planning, implementation, and evaluation. When nurses fail to use critical thinking skills or have inadequate skills, it becomes difficult to anticipate and recognize changes in patient health or response to treatment, making it difficult (if not impossible) to apply necessary changes to care. When nurses have poor critical thinking skills, they may overlook changes in their patient's status, which could indicate the need to change the treatment plan. As failure to recognize these changes continues, patients can be subjected to unnecessary treatment. When the changes in a patient's status are recognized, nurses must create updated treatment plans. While it is not uncommon to need to update or change care plans, overlooking important information or symptoms due to poor critical thinking can prolong the amount of time patients require care, resulting in increased cost of healthcare services. Effective patient care requires each member of the team to exercise critical thinking and communication skills. Nurses who do not use critical thinking rarely question treatment plans or changes in their patient's status. When there is an attitude that there is nothing to discuss, nurses stop communicating with one another and other members of the care team, resulting in poor team relationships and inappropriate patient outcomes. Critical thinking in nursing is an integral part of effective patient care. There are numerous books and resources focused on helping hone critical thinking skills. The following are examples of some resources to help improve critical thinking skills in nursing. • Tips to Improve Knowledge and Critical Thinking Skills • Critical Thinking for New Nurses • What is Critical Thinking in Nursing? • Critical Thinking in the Nursing Process • 4 Steps to Master Critical Thinking • Critical Thinking and Writing in Nursing • Critical Thinking, Clinical Reasoning, and Clinical Judgment (A Practical Approach) • Think Like a Nurse (The Caputi Method for Learning Clinical Judgment) One of the most crucial skills nurses can develop is critical thinking. At its core, critical thinking helps promote positive patient outcomes and encourages effective communication between patients, families, and team members. Nurses who care enough to ask how to improve critical thinking in nursing are instrumental in providing safe, high-quality patient care. By implementing the 18 simple steps to improve critical thinking in nursing featured in this article, you can become a more efficient nurse and help positively impact patient outcomes and interprofessional relationships. A lack of critical thinking in nursing can have a significant impact on your nursing career. Each day, nurses are faced with situations that require critical thinking and decision-making skills. These skills make it possible to be effective caregivers and promote positive patient outcomes. Critical thinking is what many psychologists refer to as a "self-driven process." Others cannot teach you to think critically. Instead, it is a practice that must be cultivated intentionally. Each person develops critical thinking skills differently. While there is no set amount of time it may take to improve critical thinking skills in nursing, you can implement measures to challenge yourself and strengthen your skills. Critical thinking skills in nursing are an essential part of effective patient care. Therefore, all nurses who wish to have a positive impact on patient care and the delivery of healthcare services should strive to develop excellent critical thinking skills. You can assess your critical thinking skills in nursing by assessing whether you meet certain critical thinking criteria. For example, if you demonstrate the following behaviors at work, you are more likely to exercise critical thinking skills. • Ask relevant questions • Justify opinions • Address and evaluate multiple points of view • Explain assumptions and reasons related to your choice of patient care options 5. Can I Be a Nurse If I Cannot Think Critically?It is important to understand there is a difference between being a nurse and being a nurse with effective skills and practices. While you may graduate nursing school and pass the licensing exam with limited critical thinking skills, your chances of long-term success are not favorable. If you feel you lack effective critical thinking skills, do not give up. There are several ways you can work to improve your skills and develop strength in your nursing practice. Darby Faubion BSN, RN Darby Faubion is a nurse and Allied Health educator with over twenty years of experience. She has assisted in developing curriculum for nursing programs and has instructed students at both community college and university levels. Because of her love of nursing education, Darby became a test-taking strategist and NCLEX prep coach and assists nursing graduates across the United States who are preparing to take the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX).