

The Best That I Can Be

If I could be the very best,
the best that I could be,
There are very special qualities
that you would see in me.

I'd be the nurse that others
Would feel free to call upon,
When my patients or my colleagues
find it hard to carry on.

So let me care and let me share
My knowledge and my skill,
and I will stand beside you
as this will be my will.

I can also take a step back
so you may have your turn.
Through skill and observation,
I know we both can learn.

And as I "nurse" my patients,
I know that you will see,
care and understanding,
the qualities in me.


I will be the very best
That I can be,
As I stand beside the bedside
and anticipate their needs.

You will see the warmest smile,
and hear the softest voice.
You will feel me truly present,
as this will be my choice.

A gentle touch, a silent tear,
to let you know I care,
or just to be beside you,
the unspoken word we share.

If you feel the need to talk,
you know that I will hear,
Your accomplishments, contentments
your failures or your fears.

May your choices be the best for you,
and if you need a hand,
Let my expertise and
judgment guide you,
as this I know they can.

May I be the nurse remembered,
the best that I could be
When I stood beside your bedside,
you saw the best in me. 

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Advocacy and the mental health client

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Before nurses can encourage client advocacy, it is important to understand what it means to advocate. According to the **Oxford Dictionary** (1998), an advocate is defined as: "a person who pleads for another," and "a person who supports or speaks in favour" (p.18). In order for the emergency nurse to plead for and support the mental health client in crisis, she must possess the knowledge regarding mental health issues and skills necessary to identify the client in crisis.

Emergency nurses are front line health care providers and an essential part of their role includes maintaining nursing skills and knowledge. By seeking opportunities to enhance skills and knowledge through the use of observation, exposure, experience and education, nursing can progress to a higher level. An advanced clinical fellowship awarded by the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario (RNAO) became the vehicle for enhancing my role as client advocate. I recently completed this fellowship experience, generously supported by my nurse manager and director.

A re-evaluation of my nursing role and the challenges faced by nurses working in a busy emergency department, in the context of this fellowship experience, prompted the realization that providing the best care possible involves taking on an active role of client advocate. Nurses are in a position to be advocates. The nurse as an advocate must not only consider the client, but the other team members as well. The dilemma is, are we as nurses ready to take the challenge? I believe the only answer to this is yes!

As a result of the severity of most mental health disorders, it is often difficult for the client to process the information given to them. This becomes problematic for nurses, "many of whom perceive themselves as lacking the skills and expertise to provide appropriate care and treatment to this client group" (Wand & Happell, 2001, p. 166). Mental health clients and their illnesses are multifaceted. Unlike the patient with abdominal pain or a broken limb whose care and treatment is clear, the mental health patient often presents with a litany of concerns. It has become the responsibility of the health professional to decipher these concerns. For nurses to assist with the care of clients in crisis, however, familiarity with clients' concerns is

crucial. Knowledge of these concerns provides an opportunity to educate and this, in turn, allows for informed decision-making by clients.


Learning is a critical element of mental health nursing. Nurses who take advantage of learning opportunities and take steps to increase their exposure to mental health clients develop a greater understanding and a more positive attitude toward this particular client population (Brinn, 2000, p. 32). Developing a better understanding of client issues, concerns, and challenges will only serve to enhance the advocacy role that nurses inherently practise on an ongoing basis.

Nurses are not alone in their efforts to be advocates. They can refer to the Nursing Code of Ethics and Nursing Practice Standards for guidance in their everyday practice. **The**

Canadian Standards of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing (1998) states that, "the nurse uses sound judgment in advocating for safe, competent and ethical care for clients and colleagues even when there are system barriers to enacting an advocacy function (Standard VI, 9). System barriers can consist of feelings of helplessness, frustration and disrespect towards the client by the nurse. **The Canadian Code of Nursing Ethics** (2002) under "values" suggests, "Nurses respect the inherent worth of each person they serve and advocate for respectful treatment of all people."

By acknowledging our uneasiness towards mental health clients, we take the first step in developing an understanding of our limitations. Recognizing those limitations is a prerequisite to seeking out learning opportunities. According to Brearley (as cited by Duxbury, 1996), "if

skills in communication, empathy, information-giving and relationship-building are developed and used by nurses, clients will benefit by feeling more in control of their own destiny" (p. 36).

In conclusion, nurses play a vital role in providing client support and education. In this way, we acknowledge that it is necessary to promote ourselves as advocates. For advocacy to be effective, however, nurses need to possess the skills and knowledge required to care for mental health clients in crisis. Continuing educational experiences through participation in nursing fellowships, or through reading articles in professional literature, should stimulate discussion of the needs of mental health clients and the special role of nurses as client advocates. 

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