



Professionalism for CNAs

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Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this two hour CE course is to provide an overview of the professional aspects of the Certified Nursing Assistant's (CNAs) role and to explore the importance of professional grooming, patient and team communication, and ethical behavior in the workplace.

At the end of this course, the CNA will be able to:

1. Discuss the importance of professional behavior in the healthcare environment
2. Review the Nursing Assistant's Code of Ethics and its application in the workplace
3. Explain the principles of ethical behavior for CNAs
4. Describe the basic principles of communication with nursing supervisors, colleagues, patients and their families

Introduction

Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs) are important members of the healthcare team and often have the most contact with patients on a daily basis. As such, CNAs play an important role in relaying communication from the patient and the family to the nursing staff. CNAs are helpful liaisons between the RN or LPN and the patient.

Since CNAs have daily contact with patients and other members of the healthcare team, it is important to present a professional demeanor at all times. Personal grooming and good communication skills are important tools for the CNA to develop.

A CNA's workload can be intense and stressful, but the desire to help people in need and display compassion for patients should remain a high priority. Knowing how to effectively communicate with patients and their families will provide great job satisfaction for the CNA. Team work and collaboration will also improve the CNA's work experience and make work more enjoyable and fulfilling.

The CNA Code of Ethics

As part of their profession's code of ethics, CNAs acknowledge their responsibility is to help ease patients' suffering and restore their health. They should consider all aspects of patients' quality of life, including their spiritual, emotional and social well-being, along with their physical condition.

In addition, CNAs should treat all patients equally regardless of their religious or ethnic background, and be loyal to the employer, patients, co-workers, and the facility in which they work.

(Weiss, 2009)

The nursing assistant code of ethics reminds CNAs of the importance of acting professionally in the workplace.

Test Yourself

True or False?

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It is acceptable for a CNA to refuse to work with a patient because he or she does not agree with the religious beliefs of the patient's family.

The correct answer is: False. CNAs should treat all patients equally regardless of their religious or ethnic background. You cannot discriminate against a patient because of his or her ethnicity, religion, beliefs or other characteristic.

Taking Care of Yourself

Before you can take care of others, you need to take care of yourself. Good health habits include nutritious meals, sufficient rest and sleep, and time for relaxation and recreation when off duty.

Also, it is important to present yourself in the best possible way. Managing your own personal hygiene and having good grooming habits will make you look neat and professional in the workplace, which enhances team collaboration and patient satisfaction.

Do not work around patients if you are sick. Try to report any sign of illness promptly to your nursing supervisor so you don't make others sick as well. Periodic health check-ups are needed to prevent illness.

Nursing assistants should take good care of themselves so that they are in a suitable condition to care for their patients.

Making a Good Impression

Appearing professional makes a good impression on others. You never get a second chance to make a good first impression. Within your first few minutes of meeting a new patient, the patient will make up their mind about you. Trust will be either instantly gained or instantly lost.

When entering a patient's room, always knock before entering and communicate your name, title and task you will be doing. This is a common courtesy and makes the patient feel valued and respected.

With every patient you encounter make sure you speak professionally. When communicating, you should be honest, clear and thoughtful of the patient's feelings. Make sure you speak clearly and concisely. Make eye contact and don't cross your arms or put your hands on your hips: this might make you appear intimidating. Use words that are appropriate for the age you are talking to. Don't use big words around children or childish nicknames for adults.

Building a trusting relationship with patients is established through effective communication. It is important for nursing assistants to be good listeners to patients as they provide care, then to communicate any concerns to the nurse.

Speaking professionally but kindly to patients can help you develop a good relationship with your patients.

Assertiveness is an important part of professional communication. Being assertive is communicating with confidence, without being rude or aggressive. An example of assertive communication is calmly but directly telling the patient exactly what is going to happen without being bossy or hostile; or letting your nurse supervisor know that you need help, without appearing lazy or abrupt.

What Does Professionalism Mean?

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Being professional means that the CNA delivers patient care in a manner that is ethical, competent, knowledgeable and caring. The CNA should be committed to protecting patients' dignity and wellbeing and display high standards of professional behavior and attitude.

Professional CNAs are responsible, trustworthy and truthful. They attend in-services, maintaining state certification and are open to learning and professional development in the workplace.

Professionalism also includes following the correct chain of command, knowing your own scope of practice and being a team player.

Most importantly, a professional CNA knows when to ask for assistance.

(Weiss, 2009)

Test Yourself

Which of the following factors detract from a professional appearance?

- A. Long and/or brightly painted fingernails
- B. Stains on uniform
- C. Untidy hair
- D. All of the above

The correct answer is D: All of the above. As healthcare professionals, CNAs need to look neat and professional at all times. This instills confidence in patients, nurses and co-workers.

What is Ethical Behavior for a CNA?

Ethical behavior of a CNA includes:

- Protecting life and promoting the health of patients
- Keeping personal information confidential
- Respecting each person as an individual
- Giving care based on need, not gratuities (gifts)

(Weiss, 2009).

What is Unethical Behavior?

Unethical behavior of a CNA may include one or more of the following behavior(s):

- Avoiding work by sitting in empty patient rooms or the break room during on-time work hours
- Having personal conversations on your cell phone in patient care areas
- Not responding to call lights promptly, when you are available to do so
- Ignoring the phone(s) assigned to you
- Using the hospital computer for personal use
- Avoiding a particular patient because of his or her ethnicity, demeanor or other variable characteristic

These types of behaviors detract from the professional image of a CNA, and interfere with the development of good relationships with other staff members, patients and their families.

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Test Yourself

Unethical behavior is:

- A. Prioritizing which patients need care first based on physical needs.
- B. Declining to assist a co-worker when your tasks are still pending.
- C. Borrowing some money from a patient to pay a co-worker.
- D. None of the above.

The correct answer is C: Borrowing some money from a patient to pay a co-worker. It is unacceptable to borrow money from a patient or their family when you are working with them in a professional capacity.

Applying Ethical Behavior in the Workplace

The CNA can apply the principles of ethical behavior in the workplace by::

- Arriving at work on time
- Being absent only when necessary
- Notifying employer prior to necessary absences
- Following instructions within scope of practice
- Being loyal, flexible, and cooperative – a team member

Unacceptable behavior which may result in dismissal may include:

- Abusing patients and/or co-workers
- Stealing or willfully damaging property
- Acting insubordinate and neglecting duties
- Altering or falsifying records
- Working under influence of drugs/alcohol
- Acting dishonesty and breaching confidentiality

Applying Ethical Behavior in the Workplace

What is **confidentiality**?

Confidentiality is the protection of another person's personal information. It is maintained by discussing personal info only with appropriate health team members at appropriate times and places.

Examples of confidentiality:

- Adhering to HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability & Accountability Act) guidelines which limits the sharing of information without patient consent
- Discussing observations with nurse or physician in private

Examples of breaching confidentiality:

- Discussing personal information with another resident, friends or visitors

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- Releasing information to members of the news media
- Sharing patient details with members of your family or members of your community, or health team members not directly involved with a patient's care

The CNA's Responsibility to the Employer

As a CNA, you have a duty and responsibility to your employer to act as a professional at all times.

As part of your professional obligations, you should:

- Always report to work on time
- Be reliable in fulfilling assignments
- Notify your supervisor in a timely manner when you are ill or unable to come to work
- Work as a team member and try to assist your co-workers whenever possible
- Perform your job to the best of your ability
- Take initiative by actively looking for tasks to be done, rather than waiting to be told what to do all the time

Communication with Nursing Staff

Building a good relationship with the RN or LPN with whom you work is an important part of your professional development. You are responsible for communicating information about your patient's status with the nurse as often as needed. When there is a change in patient status, the nurse should be notified immediately.

Poor communication with the nursing staff often leads to resentment and tension in the workplace. Try to establish open and honest communication with the nurse to whom you report. If the nurse is aware of any difficulties that you are dealing with, he or she can modify your work assignments in the best interests of the patient as well as the other staff. Poor communication is often misunderstood for laziness and reluctance to work.

You should get also information from the nurse at the beginning of your shift on the baseline of your patient and monitor for changes from this baseline.

Note! CNAs are not allowed to communicate a change in condition to a patient's family. Only licensed healthcare workers, such as doctors and nurses, are allowed to communicate condition changes to a patient's family. This is not only a legal issue, but a nurse or doctor will have more knowledge of the situation than a nursing assistant may have.

When telling a nurse about a new wound found on one of your patients, you should include information about the patients room number, what the wound is or looks like, and where it is located; but avoid mentioning the patient's name in public areas. Due to HIPAA privacy acts, you should protect the patient's name from being revealed in case visitors or other patients can hear it.

Discussing Assignments with Your RN

At times, you may be assigned to a particular patient with whom you have difficulty establishing good

rapport.

It is helpful to discuss this situation with your nurse supervisor as soon as possible, so the RN is aware of the situation and may even be able to help diffuse some tension. If the CNA verbalizes concerns at the beginning of the shift, it makes team-work and collaboration easier and facilitates patient care.

As daily tasks are completed, it is also useful to provide feedback to the RN periodically and request his or her feedback at the end of the shift to discuss what went well and what could be improved upon. This type of professional behavior displays maturity and commitment to your patients and shows you are sincerely interested in doing a good job and finding ways to improve.

Principles of Good Practice

Professional CNAs act in a manner that generates trust and goodwill between themselves and their nursing supervisors. Follow these guidelines to promote team collaboration and respect:

Giving Report

Before giving report to the next shift, you should personally observe changes in your patients by walking around from room to room. This allows you to report specific changes to the next CNA.

Answering the Phone

Do not overstep your professional role when answering the phone. Remember that you cannot give out information over the phone or take a physician's verbal order.

The doctor calls and tells you to write a new order for a dressing change on Mrs. X's abdomen.

What should you do?

You should tell the physician you need to place him or her on hold while you find the nurse to take the order, as only a registered nurse can take a verbal order from a physician. This is a legal issue.

Taking Orders

As a CNA, the care provided to patients must be done in a precise and accurate manner. Orders that are received from a nurse must be followed through accurately in order to provide safe and effective care to a patient.

Sharing Information

Information must be shared with other members of the healthcare team with accuracy. Reporting of vital signs and pain levels need to be documented carefully, as inaccurate documentation can lead to medical mistakes and have legal consequences.

Team Collaboration

Working together with other members of the healthcare team is essential in providing excellent patient care. It is especially important to foster good relationships with your co-workers and nurse supervisors.

This is done by being a good listener and taking initiative in asking for help and offering your assistance to others, whenever possible. Working together as part of a team is much more rewarding and fulfilling than trying to take care of your duties all by yourself. Co-workers appreciate offers of assistance and will be more willing to help you if you offer your help to them without being asked to do so.

Demonstrating **empathy** and **compassion** for other team members is a characteristic of professionalism.

Empathy is the ability to understanding the feelings of others.

Compassion is the ability to understand the problems of others and to want to help them because you genuinely care about the welfare of others.

Interacting with Patients

The CNA Code of Ethics calls for CNAs to provide nursing care on the same level to all patients regardless of their racial or religious beliefs.

CNAs should strive to:

- Show courtesy and respect to all patients. Make the patient's welfare and safety a top priority.
- Keep all information about patients confidential at all times, even after work.
- Carry out your duties responsibly and to the best of your ability. Be cooperative and helpful when working with others and show respect for others.
- Never perform a procedure or give a treatment you are not qualified to perform.
- Never discuss your own personal problems and affairs with patients.
- Be willing to learn new skills and update old ones. Be flexible and willing to accept changes in tasks and assignments which will improve the quality of patient care.

(Weiss, 2009)

Principles of Good Communication

When communicating with your patients, it is important to show empathy and respect. This lets your patients know you genuinely care for them and will try to help them in any way you can.

Try to show only positive emotions when talking to your patients, even if you are frustrated, angry or sad. Never display signs of aggression or hostility. Maintaining a positive attitude will help your patients feel safe and secure. If you are unable to project positive emotions, talk to your charge nurse about taking a quick break or ask to be assigned to a different patient.

When patients are on edge or emotional, it is best to speak clearly, with a lowered voice, to keep them calm. Patients are usually stressed about their physical wellbeing and this stress can affect their ability to be rational and to communicate clearly.

If patients are upset or angry, don't let their anger draw a similar reaction from you. Attempt to diffuse the situation by bringing the conversation back to their basics of their care rather than their anger.

No matter how hard you try, sometimes there may be a patient who complains and become argumentative. In this situation, it is important to alert the nurse/Charge Nurse about this immediately so that they can intervene. In some cases, it may be best for everyone to reassign the patient to another CNA. This is not a poor reflection of you or your care, but rather a recognition that the best solution may be to take you out of the hostile situation.

Protecting Patient Confidentiality

As a CNA, you will be exposed to confidential information about your patients. As part of your

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professional work ethic, it is your responsibility to ensure this information is kept confidential at all times. Maintaining confidentiality in the workplace is an essential, professional behavior in the medical field and must be maintained to protect the rights of patients.

Confidentiality is not only a professional behavior, but also a law that must be followed in the medical field.

Test Yourself

You are taking care of a patient who is angry. He strikes out at you when you try to move him back to bed. You should:

- A. Call security to restrain him.
- B. Hit him back. He has no right to hurt you.
- C. Threaten to medicate him if this happens again.
- D. Calmly explain that his behavior is unacceptable.

The correct answer is D: Calmly explain that his behavior is unacceptable. The best response is to communicate that this behavior is inappropriate and unacceptable. Never threaten a patient or tell them you are going to medicate them if they hit again. This is illegal and can be punished in a court of law. If the aggressive behavior continues, remove yourself from the room and tell the charge nurse what happened.

Communicating with the Patient's Family

The patient's family often needs reassurance from you that their loved one is receiving good care and attention. Try to introduce yourself to new family members and build a relationship with the patient's family by being friendly and professional. You can provide the family with details about the patient's physical and emotional state, but only include information that you have personally observed. It is not appropriate for you to share a medical diagnosis with the patient or the family. You can tell the family the amount of food the patient has eaten and what the patient's day was like. Only a nurse can discuss a patient's condition with the family, and only the family can learn things about the patient if the patient gives permission to the staff to share details with the family.

Note! When dealing with a family who appear to disagree on the care and/or management of the patient, it is professional to avoid getting involved in the family dynamics. The CNA can diffuse difficult situations by letting the family know that the nurse caring for the patient will be called to come by and discuss the issues with them as soon as possible.

When talking to your patient's you are NOT allowed to tell them about another patient's condition, even if it is their roommate. Due to HIPAA, you are never allowed to discuss a patient's condition or treatment with any other patient. This is illegal and can cause you to lose your license.

Patient Education

Informing patients about different aspects of their care is an important job responsibility of the CNA. However, during a hospital stay, the patient is bombarded with a lot of information, most of which is too difficult or too much to understand. Patients need to hear information repeatedly and in small, manageable chunks, so the information does not become overwhelming.

It is also important to be alert to whether the patient is able to understand you if you have an accent or

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the patient has some hearing or cognitive impairment. If you sense that the patient may not be able to understand you, it is best to ask the patient directly if they are able to hear/understand. If they indicate they cannot understand you, it is appropriate to report this to the nurse.

Whenever you are going to carry out a task on a patient, be sure to tell them beforehand what you intend to do, when and why. For example, if you are about to administer a shot, let the patient know what the medication is, what the potential side effects are, and why the physician has ordered its administration.

If you are going to take a vital sign, explain what you will be doing and why. If someone has an x-ray order, explain to them why it has been requested and what the procedure will involve.

The more time you take educating your patients, the more trust you secure with them, and the easier the care process will be.

Conclusion

CNAs are part of the healthcare team who rely on each other to provide the best care possible to all patients. It is essential to be dependable and reliable, which requires you to be at work each day when you are scheduled, to be on time and ready to work as part of a team.

Treating patients, families, colleagues and supervisors with respect is another important part of professionalism.

Caring for yourself and presenting yourself in a professional manner will provide great job satisfaction and build trust and confidence in those you work with, and in the patients you care for.

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