Communicate Clearly

CARING RELIABLY
Be Compassionate. Be Safe. Be Reliable.

Clarifying Questions

Error types prevented in the Generic Error Modeling System (GEMS)

Skill-based	Rule-based	Knowledge-based
Slip	**Wrong rule**	Decision-making
Lapse	**Misapplication**	Problem solving
Fumble	Non-compliance	

Note: Primary shown in bold red: secondary shown in red.

The least you should know

- Complete and accurate communication is a practice habit that ensures that we understand the patient we are asked to care for and/or the task we are asked to do. This understanding is called *situational awareness*.
- Understanding gives context to the choices we make. So a poor understanding leads to poor choices – garbage in, garbage out. Since patient safety is our first priority, you should know that it is OK for anyone to ask a question. If you are unsure, or you just what to be sure, ask.

Ask clarifying questions
- When in *high-risk* situations
- When information is *incomplete*
- When information is *ambiguous*

How should we use this tool?

- Good thinking starts with a questioning attitude. Ask the question in a polite, professional, and helpful way. If asking a question of someone with high *power distance*, consider using the tool for speaking-up for safety .

"Let me ask a clarifying question"

Did you know?

1. The word *communication* comes from the word *commune* – to be as one, as in "one in thought."
2. Clarifying questions ensure understanding. Use repeat-backs and clarifying questions together.
3. In one study, those who asked one or two clarifying questions were in the top 10% of communicators in the sample, and this group in the study experienced **two and one-half times fewer communication errors!**

Critical Thinking Promoting Behaviors and Comments, **Rubenfeld & Scheffer, 2006**
1. That's an interesting question.
2. There is no such thing as a bad question.
3. Do you have a different idea on how to do this?
4. Let's explore this.
5. Let's think this through.
6. I'm not sure; can we figure this out?
7. Don't believe everything that you read or hear.
8. Show me how you came to that conclusion.
9. Can we look at this from a different angle?
10. What do you think?
11. Walk me through your thinking on this.
12. Tell me what you learned here.
13. Let's see what others have to say.
14. That's one option: let's see what other ways might also work.
15. What are some possible outcomes of that approach?
16. That was a great example of _____.
17. That is a great idea, let's expand on it and make it better.
18. Use a neutral voice.
19. Use an enthusiastic voice tone.
20. Sit silently and patiently.

Safety Story

During a neonatal code, the physician ordered a 3 ml dose of 1:10,000 Epinephrine to be given through the Umbilical Venous Catheter (UVC). There are 2 options for administration of this life-saving medication for newborns; through either the venous route or as an endotracheal dose (ETT). The ETT dose is 0.5-1 ml/kg while the much smaller dose for the UVC dose is 0.1-0.3 ml/kg.

Giving the same medication via different routes with these vastly different doses can be a set up for error, and patient harm. The RN asked the physician the clarifying question, "Did you mean to order 3 ml of Epinephrine for the UVC dose?" The physician immediately, and with thanks, changed the dose to the much smaller correct dose of 0.9 ml, and averted a potentially devastating error.

Clarifying questions are the right tool anytime communication is not clear, correct or complete. In this situation, the clarifying question also acted as a method of speaking up for safety. Preceding the question with the verbiage, "Let me ask a clarifying question", gets the receiver's attention, assures your intention is known, and sets the stage for a collegial interaction.

If you are interested in learning more about the Caring Reliably program or would like to sign up for a class, please go to the Swedish Caring Reliably page to learn more. Upcoming trainings and more information can be found on this page.

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