Conducting Pre-Clinical and Post-Clinical Conferences

Objectives

- Explain the purposes of pre-clinical and post-clinical conferences
- State the benefits of clinical conferences
- Outline strategies to promote student participation in clinical conferences
- Discuss ways to prepare for clinical conferences
- List methods to conduct successful clinical pre- and post-conferences

Think-Pair-Share

*Think about what you remember about pre-clinical and post-clinical conferences when you were a nursing student. Share these thoughts with the person next to you. Share ideas generated with the group.*

Planning for Clinical Conferences

Effective clinical conferences do not happen by accident. O’Connor (2015) and Billings and Halstead (2011) propose that faculty must spend time to plan conferences based on the following elements.

- Purpose
- Topic
- Process
- Strategies
- Method for conference evaluation

Purposes of Conferences

- Pre-conference
  - Validate assignment preparation
  - Review daily expectations
  - Help set priorities
  - Link theory to clinical practice
Post-conference
  • Debrief
  • Strengthen skills
  • Vent feelings
  • Learn by using student assignments as case studies

According to Billings and Halstead (2011) and O’Connor (2015) the following list outlines purposes of clinical conferences. The purposes may differ depending on the experiences students have and on whether it is pre- or post-conference.
  • Serve as a way of sharing information
  • Help students develop problem solving and critical thinking skills
  • Provide opportunity for students to develop collegial relationships
  • Enable student collaboration
  • Exchange ideas for a specific purpose
  • Share successes and failures in clinical practice
  • Debrief students about a clinical practice experience

Benefits of Clinical Conferences
Billings and Halstead (2011) and O’Connor (2015) identify the following student benefits:
  • Promote interactive learning, collaboration, and teamwork — may share how the development of these skills relates to the practice of nursing
  • Develop problem-solving, decision-making, and critical thinking skills — appropriate to the level of students in curriculum
  • Develop oral communication skills
  • Link theory to practice
  • Provide opportunity for self-reflection
  • Enable sharing of student learning/skill mastery
  • Develop nursing attitudes and values
  • Assess own learning

Different Approaches for Levels of Students
Various approaches are more suited for different levels of students. Beginning level student needs are quite different from those of more advanced students. Benner’s (1984) Novice-to-Expert Model applies when working with different levels of nursing students.

Beginning students:
  • Tend to be inner-focused
  • Need more specific directions
  • Prefer concrete material
  • Tend to think in black and white terms
  • Are sometimes highly critical of staff execution of nursing care
  • Require skill reinforcement
  • Need to learn medical terminology
  • Require activities to promote understanding and use of nursing process
Advanced students:
- Generally understand nursing process
- Use more medical terminology
- Tend to be less internally focused
- Are usually able to see things in shades of gray
- Take turns having student-led conferences

Possible Activities for a Clinical Conference
Adult learners have different learning styles and needs. Adults prefer learning activities with realistic relevance and respond well to learning activities that draw upon their previous life experience (Knowles, 1990). A variety of learning activities can be used to simulate and motivate nursing student learning as well as add variety to clinical conference methods.
- Case study analysis with student assigned clients (nursing rounds)
- Skill building with equipment
- Clinical pathways
- Strengthening documentation skills
- Learning how to operate a clinical agency’s computer system
- Topic of the week
- Linking personal experiences with health care to services offered as students
- Nursing process activities
- Discussion of role transition issues
- Debriefing of the day’s experience (post-conference)
- Processing legal and ethical issues that arise
- Guest speaker with special expertise
- Sharing personal accomplishments
- Explaining the health care system and delivery of health care
- Cyber clinical conference
- Clarifying and assisting students with written clinical assignments
- Analyzing staff performance in nursing care situations

Debriefing for Meaningful Learning (Dreifuerst, 2012)
Use a debriefing process to foster meaningful learning. The goal of this process is to develop clinical judgment which is difficult to measure and evaluate.
- Learning in clinical context
- Socratic dialogue, narrative pedagogy
- Revisiting, unpeeling, understanding student thinking – unpeel, revisit, unpeel, revisit
- Correcting misconception of information or action
- Reflecting
- Anticipating
Debriefing for Meaningful Learning Process (preparation)
- Inform a student that his/her patient will be the clinical case for discussion
- Students complete worksheets during their down-time in clinical in order to compare their patients with the one being presented
- Debriefing occurs off the clinical unit
- Need a white board to develop a concept map on the patient being discussed
- Markers of different colors

Debriefing for Meaningful Learning Process (execution)
- Students quiet as they answer the following questions:
  - What went well during the day and why?
  - What did not go so well and why?
  - What would be done differently if had the opportunity? Why?
- Collaboratively process what happened during clinical
- Develop a patient concept map

Debriefing for Meaningful Learning Process (execution and closing)
- Explore why things were done as they were
- Anticipate potential complications that might arise with this or another clinical situation
- Close the conference by asking each student what they will take away from the clinical experience and will use as a future professional nurse
- Goal is to teach clinical reasoning and produce reflective thinkers

Faculty Role in Conferences
Faculty has a responsibility to guide and direct clinical conferences. Before a conference is executed, faculty must take time to prepare for the conference activity. Faculty also must keep students focused on conference activity, encourage student participation, and support students as they engage in the conference (Billings & Halstead, 2011; O’Connor, 2015).
- Plan discussion and learning activities
- Create questions and cases
- Present problem, issues, and cases for discussion
- Keep time
- Support shared information and ideas
- Be flexible while moving the discussion to achieve planned outcomes
- Provide non-threatening feedback
- Create an environment that is conducive to discussion
- Help student identify relationships, patterns, and themes
- Facilitate group process
- Manage side conversations
  - Likely to occur when groups exceed five members
  - Invite involved persons to share conversation
  - Outline conference timeframe and goals
• Stop discussion and use silence until all become attentive
• Assign student seating if side conversations become a chronic problem

Handling tardiness
• Start conference only when all group members have arrived
• Hold to the allotted time frame scheduled for the conference; for example, if an hour is scheduled from 1400-1500 and the conference starts at 1420, then end the conference at 1520

Handling Dysfunctional Group Members
• Monopolizer: Set limits, acknowledge desire to share information and feelings
• Playboy/Playgirl: Set limits; remind him/her of the purposes of the conferences
• Quiet one: Call on him/her directly or use circling
• Know it all: Maintain composure and set limits
• Complainer: Acknowledge feelings/concerns and set limits
• Additional information on difficult students is found under Dealing with Difficult Students (Tab 9).

Student Role in Conferences
Students also have responsibilities during clinical conferences such as being respectful, attentive and participative (Billings & Halstead, 2011; O’Connor, 2015).

• Arrive on time
• Prepare for discussion
• Stay focused on conference deliberations
• Work collaboratively with group to develop solutions and make decisions
• Examine different points of view
• Be willing to modify own perspectives and opinions to attain consensus
• Be supportive of shared information
• Ask questions when uncertain about processes or information shared
• Participate actively

Tips for Effective Implementation
Based on faculty experience in years of clinical instruction, the following tips have been found to execute successful clinical pre- and post-conferences.

• Assure a comfortable and private setting
• Have faculty stay OUT of student evaluation role
• Start on time
• Maintain group focus on conference activities
• End on time
• Create a safe climate for discussion
• Conduct conference in a private location
• Suggested seating arrangements
  o Square
  o Circle
  o U-shape
- Faculty note taking during proceedings
  - Inform students of purpose
  - Use only to organize the discussion
  - Do NOT use for student evaluation
  - Destroy notes immediately following the conference
- Have students take a pledge of confidentiality if highly emotional or ethical situations arise
- Positive feedback for participation
- Use open-ended questions

More Tips to Facilitate Student Participation
- Ask for volunteers to speak
- Target students with sensitivity
- Phrase open ended questions carefully
- Give students time to answer questions (5 – 10 seconds)
- Use Chinn’s (2012) Peace & Power
  - Check in
  - Circling to get everyone’s ideas
  - Only the person holding the object speaks
  - Check out

Conference Evaluation
Like nursing process, evaluation fosters faculty knowledge that students have learned something during the clinical conferences. Several approaches may be used by the faculty member to receive feedback about conferences from students (Billings & Halstead, 2011 and O’Connor, 2015).
  - Develop a feedback form — what kind of feedback is critical?
  - Have students complete a feedback form — when?
  - Use faculty self-reflection
  - Direct student conversations
  - Use note cards
  - Include item on clinical faculty evaluation forms

Summary
- Not all conferences will be perfect
- Things happen during clinical that will disrupt the conference schedule
- Be open to student cues
- Successful conferences require planning time
- There is always room for improvement

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