HOW’S YOUR VOLUNTEER SQUAD’S COMMUNICATION SKILLS?

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OBJECTIVES

1. Define effective communication and emphasize its importance for volunteers when providing palliative care
2. Discuss the implications of volunteer/palliative care patient communication
3. Identify communication barriers and myths
4. Discuss factors that influence successful communication between the volunteer and the patient/family
5. Describe patient/family expectations when communicating with volunteers
6. Identify strategies to prepare volunteers to be more effective communicators
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1. EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION DEFINED

- “Communication between two or more persons wherein the intended message is successfully delivered, received and understood.”

- It is a key component in palliative care and is often considered the foundation to build a relationship with the patient and family.
IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION BY VOLUNTEERS

• Providing, verbal, non-verbal, and written
• Lack of effective communication can often be an issue in palliative care
• Purposes
  – Share information
  – Influence others
  – Facilitating and improving outcomes
  – Teaching
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2. IMPLICATIONS OF VOLUNTEER/PATIENT COMMUNICATION

- Foundation for good palliative care
- Makes a huge difference in quality of care
- When done right: reassuring, decreases anxiety, distress and worry
- Excellent communication improves pain and symptom management
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3. BARRIERS TO COMMUNICATION

- Personal experience with death or grief
- Lack of experience
- Desires that the patient will get better
- To instill hope
- Fear of one’s own mortality
- Provokes emotional responses
- What to say?
- How to communicate with individuals who have cognitive impairment
COMMUNICATION MYTHS

• Communication is always deliberate
• Words have the same meaning for everyone
• Primary method - verbal
• Frequently one-way
• Silence isn’t good
• Only talk about positive things
• Don’t ask questions about dying and loss
TYPES OF COMMUNICATION

• Nonverbal-80%  
  – Kinesics  
  – Haptics  
  – Proxemics  
  – Physical appearance  
  – Vocalics  
  – Chronemics  
  – Artifacts
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4. FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE COMMUNICATION

- Family systems
- Finances
- Education/learning capacities
- Physical limitations
- Culture
CULTURAL HUMILITY

- Respectful
- Person-centered
- Being present
- Learning style
- Assess non-verbal communication
- Interpretation of life
- Spirituality
- Values
- Assess symptoms
- Anticipate
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5. PATIENT/FAMILY EXPECTATIONS

- Respect
- Honesty
- Elicit values/goals—honor them
- Explore realistic options
- Team communication
- Listen
- Unconditional acceptance
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6. STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

• Core skills
• Mindful presence
• NURSE
• Older adult communication needs
• Cognitive issues
• Encouraging communication
CORE SKILLS

• Know history/current condition
• Reminisce
• Support hopeful/realistic goals
• Acknowledge emotions/caring responses/validate
• Allow to cry
• Various expressions of frustration and coping mechanism
• ‘No one-way to express frustrations’
• Ask family how they are doing, what can we do to help?
MINDFUL PRESENCE

• In the moment
• Nonjudgmental
• Attentive
• Silent

• Other: know yourself and the other person, encourage meaningful connections, affirm, value

• Empathy (imagine what it feels like)
Nurse

- **N**=naming (sounds like you’re frustrated)
- **U**=understanding—this helps me understand
- **R**=respecting (I can see you’re really.....)
- **S**=supporting (I’ll make sure to communicate to the team what you need)
- **E**=exploring (could you say more about what you mean when you say.....)
OLDER ADULT COMMUNICATION NEEDS

- Desires information
- Disclosure of feelings
- Maintaining a sense of control
- Solidify a sense of hope and communication for a meaningful and purposeful life
- Being acknowledged
- Not talking above them
WHEN COGNITIVE ISSUES EXIST

• Environment
• Respect
• Respond to emotions vs. words
• Behaviors communicate
• Be positive
• Know the person
ENCOURAGING COMMUNICATION

• Attentive listening
  – Listen exercise
  – Validate feelings
  – Mindful in giving advice
  – Encourage storytelling, reminiscing
  – Don’t interrupt
  – Mindful presence
COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES

• Build rapport
• Right time/atmosphere/privacy
• Readiness: feeling calm/relaxed
• Use open-ended questions/techniques
• Silence is OK
• Summarize
SPECIFICS

• Set aside special time
• Sit down, ‘eye-to-eye’
• Listen, be silent
• Lean forward
• Silence phone
• Be in the moment
• Ask permission
• Encourage reminiscence
MOVING PAST BARRIERS

• Know barriers and remediate
• Recognize and support individuality and personhood
• Understand and support expectations
• Learn and apply new skills
SUMMARY

• Effective communication delivered by volunteers during palliative care is important and complex.
• It is essential to be aware of the various myths and barriers when communicating.
• Patients and family members have certain communication expectations and several factors influence successful communication.
• As demonstrated there are several strategies which can prepare volunteers to be more effective communicators.
QUESTIONS