Time Management and Prioritising

Managing your time, deciding upon priorities and planning accordingly can be one of the most difficult skills to acquire. There are constant demands on your time and attention and it can often be difficult to identify exactly what your priorities should be when there is so much to be done. It is also important to recognise that in patient care, priorities can change rapidly and you need to be able to constantly re-assess situations and respond appropriately. One of the keys to establishing priorities is to question what will be the consequence if this is not done immediately, in the next hour, this shift etc. As Matthews and Whelan (1993) point out, it is also worth considering that ‘some priorities are more obvious than others. For example the maintenance of the airway before cleanliness is obvious, but sleep and rest before cleanliness is less obvious to some nurses.’ Remember to involve your patient—their priorities may be totally different from what you imagine!

Time is a valuable resource and not all nursing time is spent on direct patient care. Managing your time involves planning ahead and realising that unforeseen events may disrupt this plan. Walton and Reeves (1996) suggest using the following mnemonic to assist in time management:

- List the activities to be done
- Estimate time needed to carry out each activity
- Allow time for unscheduled activities or errors
- Prioritise activities
- Study the activities of the day.
**Time Management and Prioritising**

**Policies and Procedures**

Refer to local Trust policies

**NMC Proficiencies**

Domain: Professional & Ethical Practice: Outcome  
1.1, 1.3 (1.1.6)  
Domain: Care Delivery: Outcome  
2.4, 2.6, 2.7 (2.4.1, 2.4.2, 2.4.3, 2.5.1, 2.7.2, 2.8.3, 2.9.1)  
Domain: Care Management: Outcome:  
3.3(3.3.1, 3.3.3)

**References**

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**Mentor/Student Comments**
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**Scenario 1**

Imagine you are a newly qualified staff nurse and you are allocated a bay of 6 patients to manage. The ward clerk has not yet turned up, the phone is constantly ringing. You have a confused patient who is wandering into other bays and the consultant has just arrived and asked you to accompany the team on a ward round. Meanwhile one of your patients has just buzzed and is trying to attract your attention.

- In what order of priority would you attend to the above?
- What factors have you considered in making this decision?

**Scenario 2**

You have been allocated an acutely ill patient to care for on a one to one basis. The patient is NBM, has a central line for IV fluids and antibiotics, and has a surgical wound with 2 drains and a urinary catheter. They require oxygen continuously, need frequent suctioning and are unable to move themselves around the bed. The patient has had no bowel movement for 4 days.

1. What nursing care will you plan to give this patient throughout your shift?
2. The patient’s visitors arrive when you are about to carry out some pressure area care, what do you do?
3. Another member of staff asks you to come to the next room to assist with toileting a patient. How would you respond and what would be your reasoning?
4. If you had not achieved all you had intended with this patient’s care at the end of your shift, what should you do?