Objectives

- Define professional boundaries
- Discuss nursing theories that provide the foundation for the nurse/patient relationship
- Describe boundary crossings, boundary violations, professional misconduct, and sexual misconduct
- Discuss social media and its impact on professional boundaries
- Identify strategies and discuss ideas to prevent boundary crossings and boundary violations

Boundaries
Boundaries and Nursing Theory

Back Down Memory Lane...
The Definition of Nursing

Hildegard Peplau

- Peplau emphasized the nurse-client relationship as the foundation of nursing practice.
- Her research and emphasis on the give-and-take of nurse-client relationships was seen by many as revolutionary.

Defining the Practice of Nursing: Revisiting Nursing Theory

VCU Health
Defining the Practice of Nursing: Revisiting Nursing Theory

**Dorothea Orem**
- "Self-care as a human need...nurses design interventions to provide or manage self-care actions for persons to recover or maintain health."

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Defining the Practice of Nursing: Revisiting Nursing Theory

**Virginia Henderson**
- "The unique function of the nurse is to assist the individual, sick or well, in the performance of those activities contributing to health or its recovery (or to peaceful death) that he would perform unaided if he had the necessary strength, will or knowledge."

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Nursing Theory Summarized

- Nursing is:
  - An grounded in the nurse/client relationship
  - Unique

- Nurses design interventions to:
  - aid patients in managing self care
  - recover or maintain health

- As nurses our role is to facilitate the client's participation in care
Boundaries: 
A Deeper Dive

What is in the literature?

- Limited information regarding professional boundaries in the nursing literature
- Much of what is in the nursing literature is based on psychiatric literature

Power vs. Vulnerability

- "Professional Boundaries are the spaces between the nurse’s power and the patient’s vulnerability." (NCSBN.org)
- Nurse’s power comes from the professional position and knowledge of private details about the patient.
The Nurse’s Power…the Patient’s Vulnerability

- In any professional relationship there is an inherent power imbalance.
- The nurse’s power is based in the fact that the client trusts that the nurse has the knowledge, experience, and expertise to help.
- It is the nurse’s responsibility to understand the role that power plays in the nurse-patient relationship.

Nursing and Professional Boundaries

What are professional boundaries?

- Defined as early as 1893 by Lystra Gretta who authored the Nightingale Pledge

...I will abstain from whatever is deleterious and mischievous...I will do all in my power to maintain and elevate the standard of my profession and will hold in confidence all personal matters committed to my keeping and family affairs coming to my knowledge in the practice of my calling...
The ANA Code of Ethics

- When acting within one’s role as a professional, the nurse recognizes and maintains appropriate personal relationship.
- In all communications and actions, nurses are responsible for maintaining professional boundaries.

What are professional boundaries?

- Professional boundaries are the limits that allow a safe connection based on the client’s needs.


The National Council of State Boards of Nursing

- The nurse abstains from obtaining personal gain at the client’s expense and refrains from inappropriate involvement in the client’s personal relationships.
The Virginia Board of Nursing

- Professional boundaries are addressed in the disciplinary provisions section of the VA BON laws and regulations (§18VAC90-300).
- The board has the authority to deny, revoke, or suspend a license, or to otherwise discipline a licensee if there is proof of violation of any of the provisions of §4.1-3007 of the Code of Virginia.

The Virginia Board of Nursing

- Professional boundaries are addressed in the code as "unprofessional conduct".
- Unprofessional conduct means, but shall not be limited to:
  - Performing acts beyond the limits of the practice of professional or practical nursing as defined in Chapter 30 (§54.1-3000) of Title 54.1 of the Code of Virginia, or as provided by §§54.1-2901 and 54.1-2957 of the Code of Virginia;
  - Abusing, neglecting or abandoning patients or clients;
  - Dating or accepting from a patient or client property or money for any reason other than fee for service or a nominal token of appreciation;
  - Obtaining money or property of a patient or client by fraud, misrepresentation or duress;
  - Entering into a relationship with a patient or client that constitutes a professional boundary violation in which the nurse uses his professional position to take advantage of a patient or client's vulnerability or dependence, including, but not limited to, actions that result in personal gain at the expense of the patient or client; a non-therapeutic personal involvement or sexual conduct with a patient or client;
  - Violating state laws relating to the privacy of patient information, including but not limited to §32.1-127.1:03 of the Code of Virginia;
  - Violating any provision of this chapter.

VCU Health’s Policy

- Boundaries crossings and violations are currently addressed in the Standards of Conduct Policy (#2132) in the customer service standards.
- Professional Boundaries:
  "While all staff are encouraged to provide exemplary customer service in the performance of their duties, staff must recognize that stepping beyond the limits (i.e. boundaries) of the patient/care provider relationship is inappropriate. Staff should not establish personal relationships with the customers they serve outside their VCUHS role. Dating patients, seeking to provide them ongoing care or assistance after discharge, offering to take care of their personal needs aside from the patient/caregiver relationship, etc. creates a conflict between the employee’s role as representative of VCUHS and his/her private life."
One Thing Leads to Another...

A Slippery Slope
- Boundary violations occur in increments:
  - first thoughts or fantasy
  - then crossings
  - until a violation which could potentially cause harm

The Continuum of Professional Boundaries

![Diagram of the continuum of professional boundaries]

- Under Involved
- Zone of Helpfulness (disinterested, neglect, distancing)
- Over Involved (boundary violations, sexual misconduct, boundary crossings)
Boundary Crossings

- Brief crossings of the boundary
- These could be intentional for therapeutic reasons.
- These could be inadvertent and thoughtless.
- Crossings produce no long term effects but should be evaluated for potential long term consequences or implications to the client and/or the nurse.

Boundary Violations

- Can result from confusion between the needs of the nurse and the needs of the patient.
- Implies harm to the patient and/or nurse.
- Characterized by: excessive personal disclosure by the nurse, role reversal and secrecy.

Professional Misconduct

- Behavior by a professional that involves an intentional compromise of ethical standards.
Sexual Misconduct

- Extreme boundary violation
- Can occur between two consenting adults.
- "Includes any behavior that is seductive, sexually demeaning, harassing or reasonably interpreted as sexual by the client." (NCSBN.org)

Consequences of Boundary Violations and Misconduct

- Discipline and/or termination from employment
- Action taken on license or certification (reprimand or revocation)
- Criminal charges

Violation Potential

- We all have the potential to violate a boundary.
**Risk Factors (Catalysts) X Vulnerabilities = ?**

- Risk Factors, catalysts, and vulnerabilities multiply and magnify each other!!
- Denial or refusal to consider possible vulnerabilities or risk factors of boundary violations = "Blind Spot."

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**Case Studies**

- John is a 25 year old cystic fibrosis patient. A nurse on the unit begins to visit him on her days off, always wants to be assigned to him when she works....

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**Case Studies**

- Alex is a 12 yo patient who has had multiple long term inpatient hospital admissions during the course of his life. The nurses on the unit have been collecting money so that they can buy him a presents. The total of the fund is $250.
Social Media and Professional Boundaries

- Includes Facebook®, Twitter®, MySpace®, Snap Chat®, blogs, etc.
- Social media and the technology associated with it is growing quickly.
- Use is growing fastest among those 35 years old and older.

Social Media and Professional Boundaries

- Boundaries in social media can be limitless.
- Posts on social media are “eternal” i.e., once deleted, posts, tweets, instant messages can still be retrieved.
- Once posts are made, they can be widely distributed to others (who may not have been initial intended recipients).
Social Media and Professional Boundaries

- Limits of appropriate social media use are easily understood if one maintains respect for confidentiality and privacy.
- Any patient information learned during the course of treatment must be safeguarded by the nurse.
- Confidential information should only be shared with the patient's informed consent, when legally required, or when failing to disclose the information could result in significant harm.

Social Media Boundary Violations?

- "It is so busy tonight... We got a kid who was a train wreck."
- "Traumatic foley insertion on new admit. I have never seen so much blood!"
- "Hi Katie. Heard that you were back in today. I come in at 11. Hope that I can be assigned to you."

Social Media Precedents

- Nurses fired over cell phone photos of patient
- Photos of dying patient posted to Facebook get four hospital workers fired
- Outraged hospital employee fired for Facebook posting

VCUHealth.
Social Media Precedents

“Records show that Hiatt had cared for K.Z. many times since her birth.”

“She was Facebook friends with Alana Zautner, Kaia’s mom, hospital officials said.”

“However, investigators also said they had concerns about ‘Patterns of behavior re: Boundaries, Authority, Relationships.’”

Social Media Isn’t All Bad

- Social media benefits health care by:
  - Fostering professional connections
  - Educating and informing consumers
  - Educating and informing health care professionals

Social Media Golden Rules: LEAD-R

- Limiting access to postings through privacy settings is not enough to ensure privacy. What you post is permanent.
- Examine your organization’s policies or consult an appropriate leader for guidance regarding work-related postings.
- Avoid “ friending” patients and family members or allowing them access to your social media accounts.
- Do not refer to patients in a disparaging manner and don’t identify patients by name, post, or publish anything that may lead to identification of the patient.
- Recognize your legal obligations to protect privacy and maintain patient confidentiality.
Handling and Preventing Boundary Violations

**Warning Signs:**
Recognizing A Potential Boundary Violation

- Excessive disclosure with patients – sharing personal information or work concerns with patients
- Secretive behavior
- Super-nurse behavior
- Singled out client treatment or client attention
- Selective communication
- Flirtations
- “You and me against the world” behavior
- Failure to protect the patient
- Frequently thinking about a patient when away from work
- Communicating in a guarded or defensive manner when questioned regarding interactions/relationships with patients
- Altering dress style while working with the patient
- Acting and/or feeling possessive about the patient
- Receiving gifts from patients

**Questions To Consider??**

- Does this patient mean something special to me?
- Am I treating this patient differently?
- Is my behavior in the patient’s best interest?
- Whose needs are being served?
- Would I be comfortable with others knowing about this behavior?
- Am I taking advantage of the patient?
- Am I comfortable documenting this behavior in the patient’s medical record?
What To Do – How to Prevent Boundary Violations

- Education, Education, Education
- Patient Safety is always our first priority.
- Be cognizant of feelings and behaviors
- Be observant of the behavior or other professionals
- Always act in the best interest of patients
- If you are doing something with or for a patient that you would not tell your colleagues or manager – BEWARE!
- Define your role to the patient and the family early on in the relationship.
- Take care of yourself by engaging in activities that renew you.

In Summary

- Boundaries ensure a secure and therapeutic environment where the health care provider and the patient are mutually respected.
- Effectively establishing and maintaining professional boundaries is essential in order to provide quality health care.
- Continuously monitor yourself, your patients, and your peers for boundary violation warning signs. If you see warning signs in yourself or others, seek help to re-establish professional boundaries.
- Appropriately disengage yourself from any situation where you find yourself beginning to cross a boundary.
In Summary

- We all have the potential to cross professional boundaries.
- We must acknowledge this potential and build accountability into our work relationships to protect ourselves and most importantly our patients.
- We must never use our professional power to take advantage of the patient’s vulnerability.

Thank You for Your Attention

Questions
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References