

**The following content was produced by ChatGPT on January 16th, 2025 in response to the following prompt:**

*Please write a 4 page article about why nurses should not talk over patients as if they were not there. Use a scholarly voice and include references.*

## **The Ethical and Professional Implications of Nurses Talking Over Patients**

In healthcare settings, effective communication between patients and providers is a cornerstone of quality care. However, a concerning phenomenon persists wherein nurses and other healthcare professionals occasionally talk over patients as if they were not present. This practice undermines the patient-centered model of care, which emphasizes respect for the individual, their autonomy, and their inherent dignity. This article explores why nurses should not engage in such behavior, examining the ethical, psychological, and professional dimensions of this issue.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The ethical principles of beneficence, non-maleficence, autonomy, and justice are central to nursing practice. Talking over patients breaches these principles in several ways. The principle of autonomy underscores the patient's right to be involved in decisions about their care. When nurses converse about the patient in their presence but fail to include them, they erode this autonomy, reducing the patient to a passive observer in their healthcare journey (Beauchamp & Childress, 2013).

Additionally, such behavior can violate the principle of beneficence, which obligates nurses to act in the best interest of the patient. Ignoring the patient's presence may cause feelings of disrespect and exclusion, leading to psychological harm. The American Nurses Association (ANA) Code of Ethics explicitly states that nurses must respect the inherent dignity, worth, and unique attributes of every person (ANA, 2015). Talking over a patient undermines these ethical imperatives and compromises the trust between nurse and patient, which is critical for effective care.

### **Psychological Impact on Patients**

Patients who are talked over often experience a range of negative emotions, including frustration, anxiety, and a sense of powerlessness. Research has shown that such experiences can exacerbate feelings of vulnerability and contribute to poor mental health outcomes (Epstein et al., 2010). For example, patients with chronic illnesses or those undergoing complex treatments already face significant emotional stress. Being excluded from conversations about their care can worsen these feelings, reducing their overall satisfaction with their care and potentially impacting their recovery.

Moreover, psychological studies suggest that feeling unheard or disregarded can diminish a patient's self-esteem and sense of agency. These outcomes are particularly detrimental in cases involving older adults, children, or patients with disabilities, who may already face societal biases that question their competence or value (Levinson et al., 2017). The act of talking over patients reinforces these biases, perpetuating a hierarchical dynamic that places the healthcare provider in an undeserved position of superiority.

### **Professional Standards and Communication**

Effective communication is a hallmark of professional nursing practice. The Joint Commission, which accredits healthcare organizations, identifies communication breakdown as a leading cause of medical errors and adverse events (The Joint Commission, 2021). When nurses fail to engage patients in conversations about their care, they risk missing critical information that the patient might provide, potentially jeopardizing the accuracy of assessments and the appropriateness of interventions.

In contrast, patient-centered communication—where nurses actively involve patients in dialogue—has been shown to improve health outcomes, enhance patient satisfaction, and foster stronger therapeutic relationships (Stewart et al., 2000). By ensuring that patients feel heard and respected, nurses not only adhere to professional standards but also promote a culture of collaboration and mutual respect.

### **Cultural and Social Considerations**

The impact of talking over patients can be further magnified by cultural and social factors. In diverse healthcare settings, language barriers, cultural differences, and varying health literacy levels can already complicate communication. When nurses talk over patients in such contexts, it exacerbates these challenges, creating additional barriers to understanding and engagement. Cultural humility and sensitivity require nurses to actively listen to and include patients in conversations, recognizing their unique perspectives and lived experiences (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998).

Furthermore, patients from marginalized groups often face implicit biases that influence their interactions with healthcare providers. Talking over these patients can reinforce feelings of marginalization and mistrust, potentially discouraging them from seeking care in the future. Addressing these inequities requires deliberate efforts to foster inclusive and equitable communication practices.

### **Strategies for Improvement**

To prevent the practice of talking over patients, healthcare institutions and nursing professionals can adopt several strategies:

1. **Training and Education:** Nurses should receive training in communication skills that emphasize active listening, cultural competence, and patient engagement.

2. **Institutional Policies:** Healthcare organizations can implement policies that promote patient-centered communication and hold staff accountable for their interactions.
3. **Feedback Mechanisms:** Encouraging patients to provide feedback on their experiences can help identify areas for improvement.
4. **Reflective Practice:** Nurses should regularly reflect on their communication practices, seeking to understand and address any behaviors that might unintentionally exclude patients.

## Conclusion

Talking over patients as if they were not present is a practice that undermines the ethical, psychological, and professional foundations of nursing. By prioritizing patient-centered communication, nurses can ensure that their interactions uphold the dignity and autonomy of every individual, fostering trust and improving health outcomes. Addressing this issue requires a commitment to education, institutional support, and a culture of respect and inclusivity within healthcare settings.

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