



Health Workforce Initiative

Hi-Touch Healthcare: The Critical Six Soft Skills

Grab-N-Go Independent Training Module:

The 4 A's:

**Attendance, Appearance, Aesthetics, and
Accountability**

HEALTH WORKFORCE INITIATIVE STATEWIDE ADVISORY COMMITTEE, CALIFORNIA
COMMUNITY COLLEGES CHANCELLOR'S OFFICE, AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM



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Independent Training Module

This publication was produced pursuant to grant agreement number 14-326-001. This project was supported by Economic and Workforce Development funds awarded to the Butte Community College District by the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office. Copyright (c) 2016 Chancellor's Office California Community Colleges. Permission is hereby granted to reproduce this work, in whole or part, for educational use only.



The 4 A's: Attendance, Appearance, Aesthetics, and Accountability

Background Information

Professional standards are defined as “the skill, competence, or character expected of a member of a highly trained profession.”ⁱ Professionalism, therefore, is the manner in which an individual performs in his/her place of employment. Because healthcare workers are constantly in the public eye, professionalism, conduct, and adherence to professional standards are paramount to customer satisfaction and an effective workplace environment. The four A's (attendance, appearance, aesthetics, and accountability) go hand in hand with professionalism, all of which can be termed “professional standards.” While in a health care facility or situation, if the patients and their families sense that the healthcare employees have pride in these standards, then the organization is generally viewed as positive and as a comfortable and safe place to bring their loved ones.ⁱⁱ

In 2011, Dr. Joyce McCullers Varner, President of the Alabama State Nurses Association, stated “as we look around us, professionalism seems to be eroding.”³ The author also stated that as personal emphasis on individuality and expression of self continues to increase in our society, sometimes professional standards are overlooked. She describes that over time, nursing has consistently been one of the top two most respected professions. One of the reasons for this sense of respect is that nurses “look like nurses.” To gain this respect, the author's suggestion is that an individual's appearance, or aesthetics, be appropriate for the healthcare environment. Uniforms (scrubs) should be neat and clean, perfumes and colognes be used sparingly (or not at all), jewelry be kept to a minimum, and professionalism be modeled at all times.ⁱⁱⁱ

Attendance and absenteeism is also of utmost importance in the healthcare



environment. Absenteeism is costly for healthcare facilities, as often employees are paid overtime to cover open shifts due to inadequate staffing. Dr. Siu (2002) suggests that psychological stress in the healthcare worker is a primary reason for absenteeism. Dr. Jean-Louis Denis (2014) suggested that nearly “12% of the United States and 10% of the United Kingdom’s Gross National Product” is lost because of stress-related absences. Increasing job satisfaction by improving the work environment along with teaching stress reduction techniques to employees can reduce absenteeism in the healthcare environment.^{iv}

Accountability is defined as the act of being responsible or subject to obligation.^v Healthcare workers, by their very nature, must be accountable to their patients and their families, to their co-workers, and to their employers. Lack of accountability in the healthcare environment can lead to decrease of quality and safety in any facility. Dr. Jean-Louis Denis (2014) describes that there are three main elements that should be used to accomplish accountability in the workplace: a clear definition of desirable goals and objectives, the ability to measure goal achievement, and a set of consequences if those goals are not met. The author describes that if these guidelines are followed, evaluated, and re-evaluated on a periodic basis, accountability will become the normal and desired culture in any healthcare environment.^{vi}

This module will focus on methods to foster and encourage the 4 A’s (attendance, appearance, aesthetics, and accountability) in any healthcare environment and provide activities to reinforce these processes.



Training



Overall Goal: This training provides participants an understanding of the importance of attendance, appearance, aesthetics, and accountability in the healthcare environment and encourages practice of these behaviors in their places of employment.

WIIFM: What's in it for me? Understanding and practicing professional standards is imperative for all team members involved in delivery of quality healthcare, regardless of job function or title. This session helps participants understand how his/her own appearance and behaviors can reflect on the organization in which they are employed.



Materials Provided:

1. The 4 A's Module PowerPoint
2. Activity # 1 – Stressed for Success
3. Activity # 2 – Dress Code: Old and New
4. Activity # 3 – Ball Juggle
5. Activity # 4 – Not Your Ordinary Sand Castle
6. “Not Your Ordinary Sand Castle” handout



Directions for the Trainer: Activity preparation information is included in this document and/or within the PowerPoint presentation notes. Each PowerPoint slide, as appropriate, includes detailed explanations and instructions for the trainer. As with all Grab-N-Go Modules, you can use it all for a more detailed training or simply use one or two of the many activities—a la carte style!



ACTIVITY #1

Stressed for Success



Goal: This activity will provide an opportunity for patients to discuss issues that cause stress at home or work and to examine how this stress affects the healthcare work environment. In addition, methods that can be used for stress reduction will be offered.



Materials Needed (Quantities vary by how many in the group):

- ☐ Butcher paper of other poster size material.
- ☐ Marking pens.
- ☐ PowerPoint slide #10



Procedures:

- Tell participants to form groups of three people per group.
- Give each group a piece of paper, along with marking pen.
- Have each group make two columns on their paper. Write at the top of the left hand column “Stressors I know” (work and/or home), and on the right hand column “My Secrets for Successful Coping.”
- Allow the groups about 10 minutes to discuss and fill out their papers.
- Call the groups back together and have a representative from each group share their information (5-10 minutes).
- Topics for discussion:
 - Were there any similarities?
 - Were there any glaring differences? If so, why do you think there were?
 - Discuss that we can learn from each other about how to reduce stress in the workplace and that we should also be able to recognize stressors that can occur with other.



ACTIVITY #2

Dress Code: Old and New Concept Map



Goal: To understand differences that have evolved over the years in regards to dress code and acceptable appearance in the health care setting and what “acceptable” appearance may look like in the future.

Note to Trainer: Definition of Concept Map – “A concept map is a type of graphic organizer used to help students organize and represent knowledge of a subject. Concept maps begin with a main idea (or concept) placed in the center of the paper. The main idea can be described in words, images, or symbols. Branching out from the center, connecting ideas are then listed, again using words, images, or symbols.”^{vii}

Encourage creativity: use words, pictures, arrows connecting concepts, etc.



Materials Needed:

- ☐ Copies of current Dress Code—one copy for each group. **Note to trainer:** ideally, you will find the current Dress Code/Appearance Policy from the facility in which participants are employed. If this policy is not available, simply pull a sample off the internet.
- ☐ Copies of old dress code (at least ten-years old)—one copy for each group. **Note to trainer:** ideally, you will find the old dress code/appearance policy from the facility in which participants are employed. If this policy is not available, simply pull a sample off the internet. Or, have participants describe what they remember or envision the old policy was.
- ☐ Butcher paper or other poster size material on which to draw the Concept Map.
- ☐ Marking Pens
- ☐ PowerPoint Slide #16



Procedures:

- Tell participants to form groups of three to four per group.
- Give each group pens and paper.
- Depending on size of paper, either have groups use three separate sheets or one large sheet divided into three sections. Instruct participants to compare the new and old policies. For each policy, groups should list words or brief sentences that describe how they feel about each policy. Using those words/sentences, groups should create two concept maps—one for the current policy and one for the old policy. (10-15 minutes.)
- Imagine: Have the groups envision what the dress code will look like in the next 10-20 years. Have groups create a concept map representing what they



ACTIVITY #2

Role Playing Listening Activity: Chart Nurse and Patient

think the “ideal dress code and appearance policy” will/should be. Encourage groups to have fun with this task! (5 minutes.)

- After the concept maps are completed, bring the groups back together as a whole and have a representative from each group briefly talk about what they discovered. (5-10 minutes.)

Ideas for discussion:

- What overlaps appear across the concept maps for the current policy? What impressions do the concept maps give (constrained/forced, approved/supported, conflicted)? What are the implications of these feelings/impressions of current policies?
- What overlaps appear across the concept maps for the old policy? What impressions do the concept maps give (nostalgic, grateful, surprised, supportive, conflicted)? What are the implications of these feelings/impressions of previous policies? What insight can be gained by comparing old and current policies?
- What overlaps appear across the concept maps for the future policies? What impressions do the concept maps give about the importance of professional dress codes? What do these impressions reveal about *current* requirements?
- What do you think about the change from the traditionally white formal attire caused any shifts in how perceived credibility is today (with multicolored scrubs and flashy shoes)?



ACTIVITY #3

Ball Juggle



Goal: This activity allows participants to embrace opportunities to contribute to the work environment. Emphasis is on being helpful, accountable, and reliable to each other and to respect the contribution each team member brings to their team.



Materials Needed:

- ☐ Soft, easily thrown balls (one for each participant).
- ☐ PowerPoint slide # 18.



Procedures:

- Have the participants form a circle.
- Give one ball to one participant in the group.
- Instruct them to toss the ball to anyone in the group except for the person next to them. Continue the process until everyone has caught and tossed the ball at least one time.
- Once everyone has caught and thrown the ball, begin introducing new balls about every 20 seconds to someone without a ball and have them toss the ball to someone else.
- Tell them that the goal is to keep all of the balls in the air.
- Keep introducing a ball until all the balls are distributed and they begin dropping balls frequently.
- Stop the exercise and have everyone come up with a plan to keep all the balls moving and all the balls in the air at the same time.
- Allow them to come up with the plan and begin the exercise again. Prompting to begin may be necessary.
- Reflect: At the conclusion of this exercise, have everyone give each other a round of applause and then discuss the following topics:
 - How did the group do in demonstrating responsibility and accountability to all members of the team as they tried to juggle the balls?
 - How does this relate to their work environment?
 - How did the group work as a team? (Did they all “eagerly” participate?)
 - How did management of the activity go? (Did anyone “take over” or was there any “argument” about how to manage all of the balls?)



ACTIVITY #4

Not Your Ordinary Sand Castle____



Goal: This activity helps participants understand the idea of collective or shared responsibility and accountability and how irresponsible behavior or lack of accountability can lead to consequences that can affect the entire community or place of employment.



Materials Needed:

- ☐ Copies of the handout “Not Your Ordinary Sand Castle”—one for each participant.
- ☐ PowerPoint slide # 20.



Procedures:

- Organize participants into groups of four.
- Give a copy of the handout to each participant.
- Read the story out loud to the group as they follow along.
- Once the story is concluded, have each group discuss the story. (10 minutes.)
- Topics for Discussion:
 - What does this story have to do with responsibility and accountability?
 - Relate this story to a recent policy change that has occurred in the facility in which they work. Ask the questions:
 - “What would happen if 50% of the employees reacted to the policy change like the first little boy that began kicking the castle?”
 - “How can you as an employee encourage acceptance and shared responsibility for the implementation of this new policy?”
 - “Have you ever behaved like the boy who kicked the castle?”
- Report out: After the small-group discussion has been completed, have participants return to the whole group to share highlights from their small group discussion.



ACTIVITY #4

Not Your Ordinary Sand Castle



Story

Morning stretched itself awake as I made my way down to the shore and joined the handful of early risers. Lazy edges of waves lapped gently over my feet and I scrunched my toes in warm sand. Good time to build a sand castle. It was modestly done mostly for relaxation. Not a thing anyone would pause to admire. After I finished the basic shape, I began to decorate the form with shells. A boy about eight years of age walked up and began to kick at the castle. I wondered what was in his mind for him to do such a thing?

What happened next, happened quickly. I held out my hand, filled with shells, and said, “Here, help me put these on.” He stopped kicking, looked at me for several seconds, then took the shells and began to place them on the castle. We decorated in comfortable silence. “I’m out of shells,” he said after several minutes. “Get more,” I replied. He did, giving some to me. After a while, another little boy came along and started to kick the castle. My little boy started to fight him. I said, “Give him some shells.” The new boy worked with us for a couple of minutes, then left.

When the entire exterior was covered in shells and shell fragments, we stepped back to look at our work. “We did a good job,” I said, “Thank you.” He looked at me, looked at the castle, said it was time for him to go and he left. I watched for a while as he walked away and wondered how long our sand castle would remain intact, and then I left for the day. Early the next morning I went down to the site. The shell-adorned castle, remarkably, had been allowed to just be. It was evident that only nature had touched it with its tide.

Thoughts about this moment in time with the little boy wove in and out of my consciousness that day. He must have been surprised when I didn’t yell at him to stop his kicking, or take even more aggressive action towards him. It certainly surprised me when I felt inspired to suggest he help. Yes, I extended my hand to



ACTIVITY #4

Not Your Ordinary Sand Castle

him, but he chose to invest his time and energy into his ornamental efforts and then felt a need to protect the creation when someone sought to destroy it. He had put some part of himself into the project. I realized that perhaps for human consciousness, investment equals connection. I realized how different life might be if we assumed our connection first. Investment in each other and our world would be automatic.

As I gave this moment on the beach even more consideration, I thought that if we don't feel or perceive our connection to something or someone, it's easy to either not care about it or them, or to destroy without thought or awareness. From time to time, I wonder if that moment is one the boy remembers - if it had any influence in his life. That moment is still a golden thread in life's tapestry. It was a lovely, peaceful solution. I realize still that when someone gives me a challenge, if appropriate, I give them some 'shells.' If I and others practice peaceful solutions with smaller problems, we may one day seek to find peaceful ways to deal with the really big ones.

Written by Joyce Shafer



References

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