

Essential Practice for Healthcare Assistants

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**Edited by
Angela Grainger**



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Note:

While the authors and publishers have made every effort, as far as is reasonably possible, to confirm the information in this book complies with the latest standards of practice and legislation, the authors and the publishers cannot take any responsibility from any instance arising as a result of errors.

Healthcare practice and knowledge are constantly changing and developing. Practitioners are encouraged to seek help where they are not competent to carry out a procedure.

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Most of all I wish to thank you, our readers, because without you this book would never have come into being. I hope you all have very happy careers in health care.

FOREWORD

Healthcare delivery in the 21st century depends increasingly on multiprofessional teamwork. This means that each member of the team understands and works within the scope of their practice, carrying on to deliver optimal care to patients that is timely, appropriate, and where possible evidence-based.

Healthcare assistants are a valuable and increasingly important part of the wider team of healthcare professionals.

The contributors to this book have direct and up-to-date experience in the recruitment, training, management and professional development of healthcare assistants and of working alongside them.

Many healthcare assistants, whether new or experienced, feel the need for an uncluttered textbook of key principles of clinical practice, skills and policy which has been developed specifically with healthcare assistants in mind. This book has been produced with the intent of fulfilling at least a substantial part of this need.

I hope this book also does something else that is important, which is to demonstrate to all healthcare assistants who use it regularly, or to those who merely browse through it, that members of the multidisciplinary team respect and value the work that healthcare assistants do, and seek to welcome, encourage and guide you in the practice of this essential and rewarding career.

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INTRODUCTION

Providing holistic, person-centred care is the goal of every healthcare professional. Healthcare assistants are part of the nursing family and as such share in the giving of direct, and on occasions, intimate, care. You may be providing care to the patient or the service user, or to their close family and friends.

How patients and service users experience the receipt of care is very important. Considerate and competent care enhances trust and confidence in the service and in those who provide it, whilst poor or inadequate care can lead to service users disengaging from the service, and also to complaints. Those who are very ill, frail, or dependent might easily feel completely at the mercy or whim of those attending them, and even one bad experience can make such a patient or service-recipient very wary of what might be coming next. Establishing a good rapport with patients and their families, and being confident that your professional knowledge and skill is contributing to the delivery of high-quality competent care will enhance your feeling of work being done well and that you have chosen the right vocation.

This book has two aims. First, to explain the theory that underpins the fundamental basics of care-giving which are part of the core duties of most healthcare assistants, regardless of the care setting or environment. Second, to increase the healthcare assistant's job satisfaction by showing how the fundamental basics of care delivery fit into the wider framework of holistic yet individualised care.

These aims dovetail into the learning principles and learning techniques discussed in the book's final chapter on work-based learning. On this point, it is hoped that this book will stimulate those readers who are interested in the possibility of progressing to become a registered healthcare practitioner, whether in nursing, midwifery, or the allied health professions such as physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, dietetics, podiatry, or chiropody, to consider undertaking the required vocational education and training.

This is a generalist textbook, and as such it covers most aspects of generic (applicable to all) practice. Fundamental practice is demonstrated in the chapters on maintaining privacy and dignity, infection control, understanding the skin in relation to personal hygiene, pressure ulcer prevention, and principles of wound healing and management, nutrition, elimination needs and catheter care, clinical observations, and communication and documentation.

The chapter on work-based learning will help you to maximise the

learning opportunities that come your way by virtue of having direct contact with patients facing all sorts of situations. This will help improve and advance your knowledge, understanding, skills, and competence, which, in turn, ensures that the patient has a better experience, time after time.

Certain other subjects covered are more specialised and include managing pain and providing comfort, caring for sick children, common mental health problems in older adults, caring for the person who has learning disabilities, and spirituality. This is because holistic care takes account of the need to meet not only a patient's generic requirements, but any additional issues facing the patient, and/or the patient's family. These can be either physical or emotional needs, or a combination of the two. Moreover some patient and service-user groups have a distinctive need to have even generic aspects of care modified and adapted to take account of their unique perspective of their situations. This includes children, older people, and those who have a learning disability or an intellectual impairment. The chapters focusing on the principles of care-giving for these patients will show you how you can apply an understanding of these principles so that you can approach the patient appropriately, explain the need for certain procedures in a way the patient can understand and accept, and perform the required act of care with no, or minimal, upset to the patient.

The chapters in this book can be read as stand-alone chapters, or the book can be read in sequence. Each chapter is referenced. Some of the chapters include information on practical care aspects discussed in other chapters. This is to emphasise that some fundamental aspects of care have an associated additional meaning, depending on the context of care. Examples include oral hygiene (mouth care) as part of fundamental personal hygiene. Malnourished or immune-suppressed patients might require additional oral care and certain special mouthwashes might be prescribed. This is therefore also discussed in the chapter on nutrition.

All learning should be interesting and fun, otherwise we are less likely to be motivated to learn. You might find, for example, that although you have minimal personal contact with children or with people who have a learning disability, reading the chapters focusing on their care needs whets your appetite for finding out more and perhaps to think about working especially with them.

Whilst much of the content of this book is generic, all of the contributing authors share a belief that all practice, whatever its nature and irrespective of the care setting, is special. This is because individual patients are at the centre of care-giving practices, and in fact patients are the sole reason for us engaging in any care-planning activities in the first place. It is a sobering thought that we receive our salaries or wages because a patient or a service user is ill, or is otherwise dependent on us to meet his/her needs. It is the

relationship with our patients and service users that make each episode of care-giving unique, and therefore special.

Even if patients or their relatives are difficult to please and we struggle to get things 'right', there is a learning opportunity here in trying to see things from the other person's perspective. This in turn helps us to acquire deeper understanding of the issues which people face when they are in our care, and helps us to develop empathy regarding how their situation seems to them, rather than only how it seems to us. Through reflective practice we can consider how we might improve things by responding differently next time we face a similar situation. This should result in a constant improvement in professional relationships and standards of care, and should reduce the likelihood of care-giving being fraught or stressful for the patient, relative, or for the healthcare professional. It can be helpful to realise that at the end of a particularly busy shift we as professional staff get to go home, whereas, for the time being at least, our patients may not be able to. On top of this, some of our patients may be encumbered by their physical body no longer working for them in the way that it used to, or they may be depressed by their health issues or by their physical limitation within an environment which is 'not theirs' and is not under their control. Remember, too, that when we go home, our patients do not cease to exist until we return therefore, unlike the healthcare professionals, they do not experience their health problems in manageable shifts but continuously.

Please do use this book as a resource tool. Also ask questions of what you read and discuss either the content, or the issues raised in the book, with your registered nurse clinical supervisor. Also read relevant professional healthcare journals, and attend in-house study days, as all of these activities feed the inquiring mind and as a result you learn more and feel more satisfied in what you do, and how you do it.

Angela Grainger

