Crisis Intervention in Dealing With Violent Patients: De-escalation Techniques

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What is De-escalation

- “transferring your sense of calms and genuine interest in what the client wants to tell you by using respectful, clear, limit setting”
- Verbal and Non-verbal techniques
- Goal: build rapid rapport and sense of connection with agitated person
Identifying Agitated Patients

Emotional Signs:
- Crying
- Yelling
- Mutism
- Arguing
- Inappropriate Laughter
- Fear
- Confusion
Identifying Con’t

Behavioral Signs:
- Rocking/Swaying
- Shaking extremities
- Tenseness in the body
- Clenched fists
- Pacing
- Skitish Behaviors
- Rapid Breaths
- Pressured Speech
- Loud or Quiet
- Poor Eye Contact
Identifying Con’t

Cognitive Signs:
- Defensive Statements
- Overgeneralizing “never” “always” “everyone”
- Black and White Thinking
- Blaming
- Obsessions/Preoccupations
- Refusing to Listen
Environmental Responses

- **Space:**
  - you to patient: 2 arm lengths, 45 degree angle
  - patient to room
- Do not block exits
- Ask if the patient needs water, a moment alone, to sit down, etc
- Be aware of clinic/office resources
Provider Behaviors

- **Be a Mirror**: if you reflect calm, cooperative, normal tone, the patient will mirror
- **Neutrality**: facial expression, Relax your body
- **Non-defensive posture**: Hands in front of body, open, and relaxed
- **Minimize** gesturing, pacing, fidgeting – signs of nervousness and increase agitation in others
- **Eye level with Client** but don’t force eye contact
- **Modulate tone of voice** to reflect empathy or no emotional response
Provider Responses

- Treat with Dignity and Respect vs. Shame & Dis-Respect
- Do not Argue
- Set boundaries
- Encourage cooperation
- Validate feelings (vs agreeing)
- Ask Questions, Provide Choices
- Repetition of boundaries/rules, offers of help, options, resources
De-escalation Techniques

- Identify who you are; Patient identifies themselves
  - if you are new to the room/patient
- Identify your purpose:
  - to help patient regain control and calm, no one hurt
- Know Patient’s background
  - homeless, history of trauma or abuse, mental health history, prior history in clinic or with providers
- Patient as Teacher
Techniques Con’t

- Active Listening
  - verbal and non-verbal acknowledgement of what the patient is communicating

- Reflections
  - “Tell me if I have this right” (then summarize what the patient says)
  - “I’m confused, help me understand”

- 1:1 verbal communication
  - do not overwhelm the Patient with multiple providers
Techniques Con’t

- Emotional-less Response
  - The “i hate the world patient” or BPD patient
- Small words
  - No Doctor Speak
- Be concise
  - Attention/Concentration is poor during anger, stress, anxiety, fear
- Trust your instincts
Patient Tools

- **Deep Breathing**
  - 5 to 10 deep breaths tracking the breath from nose to stomach
- **Body Awareness**
  - physical symptoms
- **Grounding**
  - to the room, self, situation
- **Mindfulness**
  - Object Focus, Senses
De-escalation Discussion

- **Goal:** calm the patient down vs solve the problem that caused the agitation
- **Do Not Threaten, Argue, or try to Reason**
  - Do not challenge delusions, hallucinations, fears
  - try to see “their truth”
- **Set Boundaries/Rules**
  - “I understand it's confusing when rules change, but…
  - Blame the Institution (don’t personalize)
Discussion Con’t

- Information Seeking Questions - Respond
  - “why do I always have to show my ID?”

- Attack questions - Do Not Respond
  - “why is that doctor a ….”

- Give Choices of Safe Alternatives
  - “would you like to continue our discussion in a calm manner or take a break to relax then resume?”
  - “you frighten me when you pace, can you please sit down or I’ll come back after you have walked and calmed down”
Discussion Con’t

- **Empathize Feelings, Not Behavior**
  - “I understand you are (use emotion the patient identified) but it’s not ok to yell at staff”

- **Focus on Cognitive:** when the patient is teaching you why they are upset they aren’t attacking
  - “Help me understand what you need”
  - “What has helped you in the past”
  - “I’m confused”
  - Not: “tell me how you feel”
- Agree or Agree to Disagree

- Ways to Agree
  - Agree with Truth: “yes she has stuck you three times and it hurts, do you mind if I try”
  - Agree with Principle: if patient feels disrespected “I believe everyone has a right to be respected”
  - Agree with Consensus “I’m sure other patients have felt this way”

- Agree to Disagree (be honest, Patient’s will shut down when they sense a lie)
Case Examples