

How to Work with Patients Who Have Challenging Behaviors.

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Challenging Patients

Our efforts to provide care for our patients are often seemingly inhibited by the patients themselves, as they struggle to manage emotions and symptoms with coping skills that produce negative outcomes. Working with people who exhibit negative psychological, physiological and antisocial coping mechanisms can create a sense of helplessness, hopelessness and frustration in the nurse caring for the patient. Additionally, any patient that disrupts a nurse's routine with demanding, aggressive or hostile actions can be perceived as difficult (Michaelson, 2011). These patients are often labeled as challenging or difficult. As Michaelson (2011) points out, the difficulty does not lie in the patient, but in the relationship between the nurse and patient (see Figure 1).

Nurse caregivers, according to Michaelson (2011), are challenged to stay connected with patients exhibiting these challenging behaviors. The nurse must suppress or subordinate their own feelings to present a publicly observable facial and bodily display that makes the patient feel cared for and safe. To do this, nurses must be able to manage their reactions to the behavior, provide the appropriate interventions for the patient and effectively communicate with and educate other members of the team (Bisconer, Green, Mallon-Czajka, & Johnson, 2006).

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