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Reflection as a Key Skill in Health and Social Care: Using Gibbs' Reflective Cycle

Why Reflection Is Important in Health and Social Care (talking points)

“Reflection is an essential skill in health and social care because it supports continuous learning and professional development. Health and social care professionals are expected to reflect on their practice to ensure they are providing safe, effective, and person-centred care.

Reflection helps improve the quality of care by encouraging practitioners to review their actions and make improvements where needed. It also supports safe practice, as reflecting on decisions and outcomes helps reduce the risk of repeating mistakes.

In addition, reflection helps practitioners develop self-awareness, improve communication, and maintain professional standards. Regulatory bodies such as the Nursing and Midwifery Council emphasise the importance of reflection as part of ongoing professional development.”

What is Reflection?

- **Reflection is the process of thinking about experiences to learn from them.**

- **In health and social care, reflection helps practitioners understand their actions, decisions, and outcomes.**

It supports continuous learning and professional development.

One widely used model of reflection is Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (1988).

Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (1988)

Gibbs' Reflective Cycle is a structured model that helps individuals reflect on experiences in a clear and systematic way. It is widely used in health and social care to support learning from practice and improve professional development.

The model consists of six stages:

- Description – what happened
- Feelings – thoughts and emotions at the time
- Evaluation – what went well and what did not
- Analysis – making sense of the situation
- Conclusion – what could have been done differently
- Action Plan – how to improve future practice

Using Gibbs' Reflective Cycle helps practitioners learn from experience and apply this learning to improve the quality of care.

Practical Example Using Gibbs' Reflective Cycle

During my work in a health and social care setting, I supported a service user who became anxious and distressed during personal care. Reflection was used to review the situation and improve future practice using Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (1988).

Description:

The service user became anxious during personal care and refused support. This required me to stop, reassess the situation, and ensure the service user's dignity was maintained (Gibbs, 1988).

Feelings:

At the time, I felt concerned and slightly unsure about how best to respond.

However, I remained calm and professional to avoid increasing the service user's anxiety (Gibbs, 1988).

Evaluation:

What went well was that I respected the service user's dignity and did not rush the situation. However, I felt that my communication could have been clearer to help reassure the service user (Gibbs, 1988).

Analysis:

Research highlights that effective communication and reassurance are essential when supporting anxious service users, particularly during personal care (Bulman and Schutz, 2013). A lack of clear explanation may increase anxiety.

Conclusion:

Reflecting on this experience helped me understand that a more person-centred approach, including clearer explanations and reassurance, could have improved the service user's experience (Gibbs, 1988).

Action Plan:

In future practice, I will adapt my communication style, provide reassurance, and ensure care is person-centred in line with professional standards to improve outcomes (NMC, 2018).

Conclusion

Reflection is an important skill in health and social care as it supports continuous learning and professional development. Using models such as Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (1988) helps practitioners reflect on experiences in a structured and meaningful way.

This presentation has shown how reflection can be used to improve professional practice, enhance communication, and support person-centred care. Applying reflection allows health and social care workers to learn from experience and make positive changes to future practice.

Overall, reflection plays a vital role in improving the quality of care and maintaining professional standards within health and social care settings.

References

Gibbs, G. (1988) *Learning by Doing: A Guide to Teaching and Learning Methods*. Oxford: Oxford Polytechnic.

Bulman, C. and Schutz, S. (2013) *Reflective Practice in Nursing*. 5th edn. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.