

Oregon Consortium for Nursing Education
CTA Workshop
Facilitating Development of Clinical Judgment
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Guiding the Process

The model of clinical judgment that we are teaching in the OCNE curriculum has several overlapping phases: –

- *noticing* signs, symptoms, or patterns that might signal that a patient is developing a problem,
- *interpreting* the meaning of the signs or symptoms & , deciding what additional data is needed to make a judgment about the nature of the problem and/or the need for intervention,
- *responding* – acting on behalf of the patient, while monitoring their response to the intervention,
- *reflecting* – thinking about what went well, what didn't, what are the take-away lessons.

Asking the student questions is one of our most powerful tools to help guide them through making a clinical judgment. Table 1 gives examples of times when you might take the opportunity to pose questions to the student and the kinds of questions you might ask to help promote their thinking through particular situations.

Thinking Out Loud

Sometimes, either in the interest of time, or because the student seems completely stumped about what to do, it's helpful just to tell them what you would do in a similar situation. You could say – “I would just do (intervention).” But that won't really help the student learn how to think about situations like this. So instead (unless you're really rushed). try – “this is how I think about it. I noticed that Mr. X has developed (S&Sx), so my first thought was that he might be having (problem). Just to check that out, I (identify assessments) – because often with this problem, patients will show (more S&Sx). I thought it could also be (another possible problem). I could rule that out by (assessment). But, I still can't tell for sure if it's (problem 1) or (problem 2) ; so I think trying (intervention) might help. It won't hurt if it's not problem 1, but it could help, and there are no side effects. I'll come back and check in 10 minutes to see if it's working.”

Helping the Student Develop Practical Knowledge

One of the big differences between the neophyte and an experienced nurse is a “sense of salience” – knowing what's relevant or what matters in particular situations. Nurses develop this sense through their experience with many patients in similar situations or with similar problems or having similar procedures. A really useful approach to helping students develop this sense is giving them the opportunity to see many patients who are in similar situations then guide them in learning to recognize what may be expected, what the usual trajectory is, what the range of normal is, what circumstances might require intervention and which might be just what's expected.

Send the student on rounds to do an assessment on patients with similar diagnoses, surgical procedures, or problems such as pain, shortness of breath, pressure ulcer, wounds. If you have time, accompany the student, or review after the student has assessed patients – pointing out qualitative distinctions, variations from one patient to the next.

Table 1. Guiding Clinical Judgment through Questioning

Situation to focus on clinical judgment	Questions you might ask to encourage thinking through clinical judgments
As you're making rounds, or when you accompany the student to meet a patient:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What did you notice about Mr. X? Is this a cause for concern? • What do you think it means? • So, you've identified several possible explanations for these signs or symptoms? Can you think of others? • What assessments do you need to make to determine which of these explanations is mostly likely? • What do you need to do? Are there other approaches that you can think of? How will you go about that?
As you prepare to supervise a student doing a procedure:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the steps that you'll go through in doing this procedure & equipment you'll need • Why is this procedure being done? How will you tell if you've done it correctly? • How will you tell if it's getting the expected results from the patient?
As you help the student plan for the day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell me briefly about your patients • Who will you check on first? What will you look for? • What if you find . . . ? What will you do?