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AFFECT STIMULUS SERIES:

2. Nurse-Patient Interaction

-INSTRUCTOR'S MANUAL-

When we deal with other individuals in a professional helping relationship, the feelings and emotions they engender in us have a significant effect on our ability to be of assistance. We may feel annoyed or frustrated; happy or sad; frightened, angry, etc. We often fail to acknowledge these feelings, however, perhaps because we are preoccupied with the information that is being communicated, rather than with the way in which that information is presented.

The Affect Stimulus training format is designed to help us identify our reactions to interpersonal stress. Twelve brief vignettes are presented, with eight relating specifically to nurse-patient interaction and the remaining four focusing on supervisor-supervisee relationships. In each vignette, a "stimulus" person addresses the camera as if speaking directly to a student nurse. The vignettes are based on a variety of situations common to student nurses and other health-care professionals. These situations encompass a wide range of emotions and are designed to produce an affective response in the viewer. After each vignette the projector is stopped, and viewers are encouraged to respond to their "gut level" feelings and to share their emotional reactions with one another.

The film should stimulate exploration into various dimensions of human behavior, all of which are highly relevant to successful performance within the nursing profession. With the guidance of a skilled instructor or trainer, and adequate motivation on the part of the students, the following objectives should be achieved:

- Viewers should become better able to recognize and acknowledge their own emotional reactions in highly charged interpersonal communication.

- Viewers should be able to identify the ways in which they are likely to react or respond as a result of the way they feel.

- Viewers should be able to examine and understand the likely consequences upon a relationship, should they choose to act upon their feelings.

- Viewers should also become more skillful in examining, selecting and refining optional response patterns necessary in facilitating a desired outcome in important relationships.

The trainer may find it helpful to replay some or all of the vignettes, examining various aspects of interpersonal dynamics while focusing on the emotional impact the segments have upon students. After the viewer has responded to a particular segment, a second or third viewing of the scene may provide a more empathic understanding of the pressures and motivations of the person on the screen. Note, however, that there is no single

"correct" response to a given film vignette. Responses vary widely, and the trainer should therefore recognize his own preconceptions while allowing each student to react in an honest, unbiased way. Accordingly, the instructor should discourage comments from other students such as, "How can you possibly feel that way?" in favor of, "That's interesting, though I was seeing it differently...."

In reviewing the vignettes, group discussions might be supervised initially by the instructor, who can demonstrate effective and constructive guidelines for viewer feedback. If students have difficulty confronting their feelings, questions might be asked which will probe their general reaction to situations similar to the one being presented--eventually focusing on the more specific feelings engendered by the scene, itself. The lack of involvement by students who claim little or no affective response--or show resistance to the use of film on the basis that it seems contrived and unrealistic--can itself be examined as an interpersonal style. Such individuals can be questioned as to the circumstances under which they would find the interactions more credible.

Other formats for viewer response include the small-group structure, in which students are placed in groups of three, with members designated as either "A," "B," or "C." Their appropriate roles are as follows:

A: Your role is to watch the screen and be the responder. Assume that you are interacting with the person on the screen and try to respond, with affect, to that person. After viewing the stimulus, turn to B and elaborate upon your feelings.

B: Your primary role is to be a listener, though you should also view the vignette. Observe and consider what A is telling you, paying particular attention to the manner in which you are being told. Be aware of possible discrepancies between what is being said, how it is said, and what you observed during the scene. Provide feedback for A regarding those feelings expressed. Re-state in your own way what A told you, but do not report your personal reactions to the film segment.

C: Your role is to act as observer or arbitrator. Make sure that A is satisfied with B's restatement. If A and B appear to be headed toward an agreement that "nothing happened"--or both seem to avoid dealing with their feelings--you should make them aware of their possible avoidance of the affective material.

Small-group interactions should continue for approximately five minutes, after which the leader may choose to open up a general discussion by asking the question, "Would any As be willing to share their feelings?" Eventually, instructors may wish to elicit responses from all the participants.

Before the next stimulus is shown, members of the small groups change relative positions (A becomes B, etc.), and the cycle is repeated.

The rotation of roles makes this a particularly effective format, since group members have both the experience of being stimulated and the opportunity to develop skills in active listening and observation of communication between others. It is very important, however, to spell out clearly the A-B-C roles, since the format is not one with which people are generally familiar.

A variety of other formats can be used. For instance, the class can be divided into groups of five, with each group member playing the role of A. Within each group, then, one simply shares reactions to the film segments, while the trainer circulates from group to group to monitor the activity. After a few vignettes have been discussed in this manner, the class is reassembled and class members share their reactions in a large group context.

Whichever format is used, each person in the class should view the film as if he or she alone were being confronted by the person on the screen. It should be made explicit that the viewer not attempt to analyze what is happening in the filmed monologue, but rather concentrate on the feelings evoked by this "stimulus" person. Experience has shown that there is sufficient material for separate, cognitive discussions after each vignette, and appropriate questions such as, "What do I do?" and "What is ethical?" often arise. Nevertheless, the instructor should delay such discussions until the affective component has been fully explored.

The film should be stopped for discussion after each segment, with individual vignettes projected as many times as desired.

The following is a brief guideline to the areas explored in each vignette:

1. A high-strung middle-aged man confronts the competency of the nurse. "You're just a student," he says, apparently sensing a conspiracy of which he is the reluctant guinea pig. The scene was designed to engender in the viewer feelings of rejection and overall helplessness in the face of hostile interaction. The issue of student as practitioner is raised as well.

2. A somewhat annoying woman refuses to acknowledge the nurse and insists on seeing the doctor. Though the woman does not appear to be suffering from any severe illness, she rambles on incessantly in her demands. "Why do I have to tell you information that I will only have to repeat later?" The scene might stimulate discussion regarding the ways in which a nurse might deal with a garrulous and somewhat neurotic personality for whom little sympathy seems appropriate.

3. In the first of the vignettes dealing with nurse-supervisor interaction, a woman presents a conflicting statement that is both reassuring and threatening. "Though I like you very much," she says, "I question what you do with your time." Although some-

what unclear in its intent, this vignette focuses on the interpersonal dynamics associated with typical in-program politics. The viewer might feel uncomfortable when asked to shape a response to the stimulus person, whose "mixed messages" often elicit a variety of emotions, ranging from mild acceptance to anger and perhaps culminating in overall frustration.

4. A depressed, whining middle-aged man ruminates on problems which range from an inability to communicate with his children to a general personal despondency. "Uh, I just don't seem like I can get ahead on anything," he moans, avoiding eye contact with the viewer while arousing feelings of helplessness and despair. The scene poignantly demonstrates the Law of Reciprocal Affect-- that is, the receiver of an emotionally-tinged message tends to experience the same emotion as the sender. Viewers might attempt initially to deal with their own feelings of despair before identifying these emotions with either the hopelessness of man's plight or--more specifically--the futility of dealing with this person's dependency needs. Experience has shown that the attempt by viewers to understand both their own dynamics as well as the situation of the stimulus person often provokes insightful discussion.

5. A young female patient is lying in bed, presumably dying of a terminal illness or severely handicapped to the point of hopelessness. She is in the prime of her life, with many or all of her dreams no longer attainable. "Why me?" she pleads. "...It just isn't fair!" The instructor should feel free to explore the impact upon students of varying degrees of hypothetical illness, ranging from a malignant tumor to an ingrown toenail.

6&7. A staff physician is presented in two consecutive vignettes designed to explore the polarities of the student's affective responses to praise, on the one hand, and harsh criticism, on the other. The scenes are of particular value to individuals who find it difficult to accept either positive or negative regard. Furthermore, some students may find one vignette more credible than another, raising the question as to whether that credibility is, in fact, intrinsic to either of the scenes or rather a characteristic of the student's ability to deal with the affect that is being generated.

8,9&10. These vignettes contain examples of three persons who are, to varying degrees, seeking a relationship with the nurse which will extend beyond existing professional boundaries. They display varying forms of seductive behavior which is both explicit and implied. In vignette #8, an attractive young female makes an explicitly sexual advance while suggesting to the nurse, "You really oughta try it sometime; you really oughta try it!" While some students might adamantly reject the stereotyped image of this female homosexual, one should remember that her seemingly flagrant characterization has hardly been identified as such by students with limited exposure to this phenomenon. In vignette #9, an energetic young man approaches the viewer in a rather awkward, though insistent, manner, explaining

that, "...we really have a lot in common," while proceeding to bombard the nurse with a barrage of well-intentioned yet bothersome rhetoric. In discussing the affective response to this scene, students who are "turned off" by the young man might examine the nature of this rejection, determining whether their decisions are based on the man's persistent approach or due, in fact, to personal feelings regarding his physical appearance. In vignette #10, a rather athletic young male attempts to secure a more involved relationship with the nurse. "I'd really like to be close friends with you," he says, in a low-keyed and somewhat boyish manner that might easily evoke a more sympathetic response from the viewer. Since the sexual preferences of the young men presented in vignettes nine and ten are intended to be rather vague, the scenes are appropriate for either male or female viewers. Furthermore, a comparison might be made between the responses of male and female viewers in discussing their affective responses to both vignettes.

11. This vignette, like #3, focuses on the interaction between a student nurse and a supervisor or senior faculty member--in this case, a male. "Are you aware of how other people are relating to you?" he asks, displaying a negative regard for the nurse who is disruptive to the staff and generally unable to separate her personal problems from her job duties. The scene is designed to elicit feelings ranging from anger, resentment and hostility to loneliness, rejection and frustration.

12. In the final vignette, an insolent young man addresses the nurse in a tone of voice that is sarcastic, and humorous in its exaggeration. On one level, the scene can be viewed simply as comic relief added onto the end of the film. In a more serious vein, however, it treats the nurse as an object seen through the eyes of a somewhat objectionable character. Included in the other interpretations of this scene have been instances of ethnic stereotyping. One daring instructor has even suggested that the stimulus person represents the spouse and/or lover of a nurse who has just returned home.