FreshRN Podcast  
Season 4, Episode 8

How To Trust Your Nursing Judgement

Key Focus:  As a new nurse, when do you know when it is it okay to trust your own nursing judgement?

There comes a point at the end of orientation, or right after, you have to trust your training, expertise, experience, clinical decision-making. This episode is based on Kati’s blogpost; here we discuss our personal experiences related to the examples given by other nurses.

https://www.freshrn.com/2017/10/10/trust-your-nursing-judgment/

- It’s normal to be nervous about trusting yourself.
  - Responsible for patients, by yourself, for the first time.
  - It’s just you; no one checking behind you at your charting or your patient care

Quote #1: “When I was forced to rely on it.” - Micki P
Sometimes you may not be able to go to anyone else; you just have to do it.
Examples:

1. Patient with a poor neuro exam, and a non-functional ventriculostomy drain.
   - I was the **only** neuro nurse in house.
   - Doctors knew the drain wasn’t functional; we were “just watching”
   - Only neuro change was one pupil getting larger.
   - Do I call? No one else for me to ask.
   - I did; I couldn’t live with myself if something happened.
   - Uh oh. “Mean” neurosurgeon on call.
   - Drain was replaced. I was complemented on making the right call!
   - Exciting! **Good outcome!**

   - DI causes high levels of sodium in the blood.
   - Levels were already high, AM lab revealed it was somewhat higher.
   - Do I call? The surgeon is someone who notoriously doesn’t like to be called at night.
   - I did not call. I’ve been cursed at by him before, and the level was already high. He knew about it.
   - **Bad Decision!**
   - The surgeon was ANGRY when he came in.
   - Sodium was high enough, it could be life-threatening.
   - Fortunately, patient received the necessary treatment, and had no adverse outcome.

When trusting your judgement, you may be right, but you could also be wrong. Recognize that, and always err on the side of caution. It’s better to be safe than sorry.

When you think something is wrong, have some objective data.
- Report what you see
- Objective data is harder to discount.
- Some things nurses think about when calling a provider:
  - Am I going to communicate the message the right way?
  - Am I gonna use the right words?
  - Is what I’m seeing really what’s wrong or going on?
- With experience, you learn the words/verbiage to use.
  - It’s okay to say, “I’m concerned, I just can’t quite explain what’s going on, but this is what I see.”
- You have knowledge! You passed your boards. You made it through nursing school. You know if something is not going the way it should.
- If you’re wrong, you’re wrong.. at least you’ve taken the time to alert someone.
Quote #2: “When my observations were confirmed with increasing frequency.” -Anastasia M
When noticing ‘x’... ‘x’ is right. I’m expecting ‘y’... and ‘y’ is right.

- When you get this self-validation (the things you’re predicting come to fruition), it’s easier to trust yourself and your judgement.
- Sometimes it doesn’t happen right away.
  - For example: You notice signs of early sepsis... You alert powers that be. Basic tests okay. But then later on... they are getting sicker and then full blown sepsis is identified. You were right!
- Delayed validation will help you identify better questions to ask.
  - Was something done on day 2 or day 3 differently that, if we would have done on day 1, we would have caught it sooner?

Quote 3: “When co-workers started asking my thoughts and opinions (more experienced nurses). I felt like if they thought I was good enough, that what I thought mattered, I must be then.” -Jackie T

- Experienced nurses should value the new nurse & their clinical judgement
  - When this occurs, it can have a powerful impact on the new nurse
- This does not show weakness on the part of the experienced nurse, rather it helps to empower the newer nurse.
- Helpful Hint: Always share positive feedback that you hear, regardless of the source, with other staff.
  - Both new and experienced nurses benefit from positive reinforcement.

Quote 4: “[Trusting your own judgement kicks in] when you can confidently teach others.” -Stephanie B

- Validation occurs when you can educate a new nurse, or a patient, about a particular topic or disease process and have a good response.
  - For example: being able to teach about the difference between Type I and Type II Diabetes, and recognizing that you do have knowledge of the subject.
- Solidifies trusting yourself.
  - You can experience this as a new grad, as well as an experienced nurse transitioning to a new specialty.
- Precepting helps both the preceptor and preceptee keep up to date with the latest practice standards
Quote 5: “Time. As it went on and my gut continues to be right about patients, I trust it more and more. I value being able to ask more experienced nurses their opinion. But I’ve loved the strengthening feeling of “I got this!” With each shift and with each health issue I’ve caught that could’ve been missed (or had already been by others). I’m not perfect, but I do my best to also learn from my mistakes, which I also feel makes me a stronger nurse.” -Stephanie D

- No magic switch that flips when you’re done with orientation, that tells you to trust yourself.
- Time and consistency with:
  - Being able to teach others
  - Being ‘right’ more frequently
  - Others coming for you for advice.

Other thoughts:

- What about asking others?
  - When asking questions, think about this: Are you seeking answers or validation? It’s a thin line.

- This is a time when you are applying your text-book knowledge, and what things look like “in the real world”. They don’t always match perfectly.

- What about experienced nurses?
  - They trust their judgement, but still seek out others for counsel
  - Sometimes they are wrong too!

- Keep up with continuing education!
  - Read research articles, especially as they apply to your specialty.
  - Validates your existing knowledge, but will also add more
  - This is a personal responsibility; no one will tell you that you have to
  - Things change in medicine and will impact your practice
  - Not all research will change your practice, but being aware of the topics of study will enable you to answer more thoughtful questions in your everyday practice.
  - Seeing that you are keeping up to date will also build your credibility with your co-workers and the providers with whom you work!

Here’s the take-away!

The power of trusting your judgement can make a huge impact on a patient. The power of a nurse’s voice, and a group of nurses voices’, can save a patient’s life!
Speak Up! Do not be afraid. Even if you're wrong, it would be worse if you didn't speak up and the patient had a negative outcome.