CONTENT VS. CONCEPT
“CAN’T SEE THE FOREST FOR THE TREES”
Theresa Benzel, DNP, RN, Assistant Professor

Have you ever heard of the saying “can’t see the forest for the trees”? Many times as students and instructors, we focus on the details and tasks of patient care rather than seeing the patient as a whole person. When have you ever taken care of a patient who had only one problem/diagnosis? Do these other issues play a role in what is happening with them now? As we explore new approaches to teaching, "concept-based nursing" is a method that stresses identifying and thinking through concepts and big ideas. Concept-based nursing offers faculty and students a chance to organize information collaboratively in ways that can be quickly linked and applied to any situation. Dr. Linda Caputi, a nationally recognized author on concept-based nursing, has created an exercise that allows students to compare and contrast patients and link theory to clinical concepts.

Having taught Medical-Surgical Nursing I for the past 10 years, it is evident that students struggle with nursing task completion and holistic care. Pieces of information gained from these tasks are only part of the puzzle these patients represent. Seeing the bigger picture with all the pieces present can only make understanding easier. As you learn more about your patient, you must be able to analyze what it all means and relate it back. This is “clinical reasoning” and/or that dreaded “critical thinking” that we as instructors are always talking to you about. To help my students see the “forest,” I utilized Dr. Caputi’s exercise to help them see the bigger picture.

Students were assigned to patients who had a similar condition (CHF). They were to look at history, pre-existing conditions, diet, medications, treatments, etc. They were also to visit each patient and perform an assessment. Was the patient receiving care that was suggested from their nursing textbooks? During post-conference, the students presented their patient information and were to identify similarities or commonalities. This is where for my students the proverbial “light bulb” lit up. It was very interesting for them to hear that even though their patients all differed in age, gender and socioeconomic background, most of the patients’ underlying issues were much the same. They were linking that many of their patients were on restricted diets, yet many did not follow those restrictions. Medications were similar in classification but may have been prescribed in different doses or frequency. During our post-conference discussion, diet was a main topic on which we spent several minutes. We were fortunate enough to have been sharing the conference room with the dietitian that day, and we were able to explore what a 2 gram sodium diet really meant! One cup of most regular canned soups packs a whopping 1,000 milligrams of salt. The students were amazed that this was half of the daily allotment of sodium in one cup.

As we were wrapping up, one of my students noticed that her patient’s family had brought in some “Cheetos” for the patient’s snack. The student made the point that not only is it important to teach the patient but the family as well. She has now seen the “forest” and all the “trees” that help make it!

Student Organization Spotlight
PHI THETA KAPPA

Phi Theta Kappa (PTK) is the largest two-year honor society in the world. The Aultman chapter, founded in 2010, is named Beta Sigma Theta. PTK offers students leadership and honors activities, as well as a wealth of scholarships and career networking opportunities. To be eligible to join Phi Theta Kappa, students must have a cumulative GPA of 3.60 and have completed at least 12 credit hours at Aultman College. For more information, visit www.ptk.org or contact Jen Penso.