



Mental Health Nursing Evaluation Form: A Patient Assessment Guide

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Abstract

Nursing notes are essential for mental health nursing, and thus they should be included in mental health education for undergraduate nursing students. In clinical settings, It has been observed that fourth-year nursing students commonly omitted critical information from the assessment of mentally ill patients, neglecting their requirements as well as losing valuable learning opportunities. For this reason, an evaluation form has been created and implemented in order to optimise the student's learning opportunities.

The main objectives that motivated the design of this instrument were to support the nursing student's learning process, promote a systematic record of the mental examination, and apply specific descriptors in the assessment of the patient's mental state.

This evaluation form was designed according to a systematic and standardized registration system, including the main areas that compose mental health assessment.

This cost-effective tool has significantly facilitated the student's learning and training in mental health nursing. During the five-year period in which this instrument has been applied, student records improved in quality, precision, as well as a positive opinion about it from students. Besides, this document has been recently used in the context of distance education and clinical simulation in mental health by assessing patients in simulated situations, with positive outcomes.

Keywords: Assessment; Mental health nursing; Education; Health Education; Nurse's note

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Nursing notes are used primarily as a communication tool between nurses, doctors and member of the professional team to ensure continuity of patient care. The use of nursing progress notes of the Psychiatric Department allows, among other things, a better understanding of the life course of some hospitalized patients [1]. Therefore, these notes are essential for nursing education, and must be incorporated during the training process for undergraduate nursing students.

The mental health nursing evaluation form is basically a structured assessment sheet where the students can develop their own nursing notes. This innovation has been initiated as a teaching instrument in the context of the systematization of the record of the mental examination assessment in 2015, with fourth-year nursing students at the University of Talca.

At first, before implementing this innovation, it was observed that students commonly omitted critical information from the assessment of mentally ill patients, neglecting their requirements as well as losing valuable

learning opportunities. This was a serious problem due to the limited seven-day period spent per student on these clinical settings.

An evaluation form was created and implemented in order to optimise the student's learning opportunities in the clinical field. These assessment instruments help development of care plans by identifying client needs, utilization of social resources, and evaluation of outcomes [2]. Besides, it is possible to improve nurse skills in documentation of care by means of clear assessment instruments, resulting in high quality nursing care [3].

The main objectives that motivated the design of the mental health nursing evaluation form were to support the

nursing student's learning process, promote a systematic record of the mental examination, and apply specific descriptors, so-called technical concepts, in the assessment of the patient's mental state.

This evaluation form was designed according to a systematic and standardized registration system. The assessment sheet covers most areas one would expect when assessing the needs of clients with mental health disorders, and for developing a care plan. These areas are based on the book titled "Psychiatric Semiology" from Caponi [4]. Students must select the options that best represent the patient's behaviour, mental and emotional state, among other relevant areas (Table 1).

Area	Main items
General description	Appearance and hygiene, habits, sleep pattern, support network
Behavioural description	Rapport with the examiner, psychomotor activity and behaviour, attitude towards the examiner, mechanisms for coping with stress
Language	Verbal communication, tone of voice, verbal response, understand ability of language, reliability of the story
Humour and affectivity	Mood, predominant emotion, alteration of affect, level of self-esteem
Perception disturbances	Psychotic symptoms (e.g. hallucinations, delusions) Disorders not associated with psychosis (e.g. hearing loss, visual difficulty) Content, structure and speed of thought
Thought processes	Content, structure and speed of thought
Sensory and cognition	State of consciousness, orientation, memory and impulse control
Judgment and reasoning	Degree of understanding of the consequences of their actions, awareness of mental illness

Table 1: Main items per area, assessed by the evaluation form.

Between 2015 and 2020, this document has been progressively modified in conjunction with the students who have utilised it. This has been done in order to facilitate the assessment of the mental state of the people assisted, in addition to encouraging the active participation and empowerment of students in the development and evaluation of an assessment sheet.

After using this instrument, the students suggested modifications that were analysed together and, eventually, incorporated into the form. Another relevant aspect is that the records written by the students are archived in the clinical file of the patients treated. This allows continuity of care, strengthening student learning in matters not only of assessment but also of monitoring changes in the behaviour and mental state of the people attended, consolidating the learning.

This cost-effective tool has significantly facilitated the student's learning and training in mental health nursing. During the five-year period in which this instrument has

been applied, student records improved in quality, precision, and a positive opinion about it from students. Besides, this document has been recently used in the context of distance education and clinical simulation in mental health by assessing patients in simulated situations, with positive outcomes.

The greatest difficulty is the student's initial lack of familiarity with this instrument. This problem has been tackled by means of a detailed explanation from the nurse tutor before using it with patients, while responding to any question, opening discussions and analysing the instrument.

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