Editor’s note: In the last issue, we explored relationships between colleagues. Join us this issue as we discuss the nurse-patient relationship.

A therapeutic nurse-patient relationship is defined as a helping relationship that’s based on mutual trust and respect, the nurturing of faith and hope, being sensitive to self and others, and assisting with the gratification of your patient’s physical, emotional, and spiritual needs through your knowledge and skill. This caring relationship develops when you and your patient come together in the moment, which results in harmony and healing.¹ Effective verbal and nonverbal communication is an important part of the nurse-patient interaction, as well as providing care in a manner that enables your patient to be an equal partner in achieving wellness.²

Here are some tips to consider:

- Introduce yourself to your patient and use her name while talking with her. A handshake at your initial meeting is often a good way to quickly establish trust and respect.
- Make sure your patient has privacy when you provide care. Be sure that her basic needs are met, including relieving pain or other sources of discomfort.
- Actively listen to your patient. Make sure you understand her concerns by restating what she has verbalized. For example, “Mrs. Smith, you mentioned that you were concerned that your bone pain won’t be addressed in a timely manner?” However, don’t use restating too much in a conversation because it can be perceived by your patient that you aren’t really listening to her. Be real, showing your genuine self when communicating with her.
- Maintain eye contact. Remember, too much eye contact can be intimidating. Smile at intervals and nod your head as you and your patient engage in conversation. Speak calmly and slowly in terms that she can understand. Your voice inflection should say “I care about you.”
- Maintain professional boundaries. Some patients need more therapeutic touch, such as hand-holding and hugging, than others and some patients prefer no touching. Always respect differences in cultures.

You can help your patient achieve harmony in mind, body, and spirit when engaging in a therapeutic relationship based on effective communication that incorporates caring behaviors. It’s a win-win situation in which you and your patient can experience growth by sharing “the moment” with each other.

REFERENCES