A Professional Growth Module:

ENHANCING ATTENTION TO DETAIL
We hope you enjoy this inservice, prepared by registered nurses especially for nursing assistants like you!

**Instructions for the Learner**

*If you are studying the inservice on your own, please do the following:*

- Read through all the material. You may find it useful to have a highlighting marker nearby as you read. Highlight any information that is new to you or that you feel is especially important.

- If you have questions about anything you read, please ask __________________________.

- Take the quiz. Think about each statement and pick the best answer.

- Check with your supervisor for the right answers. You need 8 correct to pass!

- Print your name, write in the date, and then sign your name.

- Keep the inservice information for yourself and turn in the quiz page to __________________________ no later than _______________. Show your Inservice Club Membership Card to _______________________ so that it can be initialed.

- Email In the Know at feedback@knowingmore.com with your comments and/or suggestions for improving this inservice.

**THANK YOU!**
A Professional Growth Module:
Enhancing Attention to Detail

WHY IS LISA LOSING IT?

Marlene, the Nursing Supervisor, was preparing to conduct a performance review with Lisa, one of the Nursing Assistants on her team.

Recently, Marlene had gotten feedback that Lisa’s work was sloppy. She was missing important tasks, like checking her clients’ blood sugars on time, and her documentation seemed to contain a lot of errors.

Marlene believed that Lisa was good at her job and really wanted to understand what was going on. She decided to observe Lisa for a few days to see if she could find the problem and help Lisa make improvements.

Over the next few days, Marlene noticed two important things going on. First, Lisa was trying to do too much at one time. She was multi-tasking. Unfortunately, when she tried to do too many things at once, she was not able to give her full attention to anything . . . and this was causing her to miss important details.

The other thing Lisa was doing was rushing through her documentation. She was not managing her time very well and often had to stay late to finish her documentation. This caused her to feel stressed—and being rushed and stressed was leading to mistakes in her documentation. She often forgot to document the details of the care she had given to her clients and even documented in the wrong chart several times.

Once Marlene understood what was happening, she was able to sit down and talk to Lisa about making some improvements. They discussed the problem of multitasking and thought up some ways for Lisa to manage her time better. When these two things were resolved, Lisa’s attention to detail improved.

- As a Nursing Assistant, you have hundreds of details to be aware of on any given day. You must be aware of all the details of your employer’s policies and procedures, each individual client’s plan of care, your client’s health status and any abnormal observations, each client’s personal preferences, abilities and needs—and you must accurately document all the details of your clients health and the care you gave (because the client’s chart is a legal document).

So, how do you keep yourself focused so you can be sure to attend to all the details? Keep reading to learn how you can improve your concentration, your memory and your attention to detail!
RECEIVING THE DETAILS

How do you take in all the details that are important throughout your day? You do it by using your senses.

With your eyes, you can see a client’s:
- Body posture.
- Skin color, bruising or swelling.
- Facial expressions (such as smiling, frowning, grimacing or crying).

With your ears, you can hear a client’s:
- Raspy breathing.
- Coughing.
- Sneezing.
- Crying or moaning.

With your nose, you can smell a client’s:
- Breath.
- Body odor.
- Bowel movement.
- Vomit.

With your fingers, you can feel a client’s:
- Skin temperature.
- Skin texture.
- Pulse.

CAN YOUR SENSES FAIL YOU?

The problem with using your senses to take in details is that the senses can be easily overloaded, forcing your brain to make decisions about what “information” needs attention.

For example, as you sit here reading this page, your brain may be filtering out the sounds coming from the next room, the color of the walls, the smell of lunch being served in the dining hall. Or maybe it’s not. Maybe your brain is actively taking in any “outside” details, keeping you from focusing on the words on this page!

Your senses are useful tools for taking in details ... but you have to develop your concentration and memory to be able to use them most effectively!

So, to start enhancing you attention to detail, you must first tune up your concentration and memory!

WHAT’S NEW? Grab your favorite highlighter! As you read this inservice, highlight five things you learn that you didn’t know before. Share this new information with your co-workers!

STORING MEMORIES

Think of your brain as a closet with three separate storage bins. There is one bin for sensory memories, one for short-term (or working) memories, and one bin for long-term (or permanent) memories.

- The Sensory Memory Bin holds an exact copy of what is seen or heard. This is a small bin and can’t hold very much for very long.
- The Short-Term Memory Bin holds information that moves from the sensory memory bin. We move information to this bin by concentrating on it and giving it some importance. The information in this bin is very vulnerable to interruptions.
- The Long-Term Memory Bin stores permanent information that we find meaningful and important for future use. This is where we store memories like how to write and talk and ride a bike!
IMPROVING CONCENTRATION & MEMORY

Concentration and memory go hand-in-hand.

- **Concentration** is the ability to focus your attention on one particular thing above all others. For instance: Are you concentrating on this page? Or, are you receiving input (sounds, sights, smells) from other sources? When you are able to fully concentrate on one particular thing, you are more likely to notice all the important details.

- **Memory** is the ability to remember information, experiences and people. Good concentration will enhance memory.

Remember Lisa from the beginning of this inservice? She was “multi-tasking.” That means she was not concentrating or giving her full attention to one thing at a time. This caused her to miss important details of her job. It also left her struggling to remember what she did or didn’t do for each client . . . leading to errors and gaps in her documentation.

**Test yourself!**

Read these 12 words, then cover the page. On a separate sheet of paper, write as many of the words as you can recall.

- Glass
- Fall
- Speaker
- Ready
- Basket
- Frame
- College
- Shoes
- Medium
- Spoil
- Hello
- Final

**How did you do?** If you were able to recall at least 10 of the words, you already have great concentration and memory! If not, think about some of the factors that may be interfering with your efforts, such as:

- **Are you getting enough sleep?** Many studies have shown that not getting enough sleep can decrease your ability to concentrate and keep you from being able to remember important details.

- **Do you eat a balanced diet?** Your brain needs energy and nutrients to focus and remember things. If you are not eating nutritious foods just before work and during your breaks, your brain will run out of steam!

- **Are you under too much stress?** Stress zaps your energy and your ability to focus and recall important information. Stress reduction techniques like meditation, yoga and belly breathing can all help you relieve stress.

- **Is something or someone distracting you?** Distractions are everywhere and you can never be rid of them completely. But, you can learn how to handle them quickly and then get right back to your task. If someone interrupts to make a request, you can quickly jot down the request to do when you are finished. If someone just wants to chat, politely tell the person that you are in the middle of an important task—and let them know you’ll get back to them when you’re done.
STOP MULTI-TASKING!

Since the mid 90’s, we’ve been told that in order to be good at what we do, we have to be able to juggle many things all at once. In other words, multi-task.

- **Multi-tasking** is doing more than one thing at a time. Sounds like a great way to cram more into your day, right? You can put your make-up on in the car while you drive to work. You can return a call to your child’s school when you sit down to do your charting.

While it may seem like you are really getting a lot done when you do several things at once, the truth is that people who *constantly* perform several tasks at once may not accomplish anything as well—or as fast—as if they tackled one task at a time.

- Brain-scan studies have shown that doing two things at once cuts the brainpower available for both tasks in **half**.
- Multitasking *increases* the level of stress hormones in the body, which can affect memory.
- Multitasking can be *dangerous*—and mistakes can even be deadly.

BREAK THE HABIT!

Most healthcare workers are in the habit of multi-tasking. Your training probably even included lessons in how to take care of many things all at once.

Sometimes multi-tasking is unavoidable. But, you don’t have to do it all day long! The most efficient nursing assistant knows how to give full attention to the task at hand. That means:

- When you are giving care to a client, you are *present* with the client.
- You begin and end the task completely before moving on to another task.
- You keep your mind focused on the client you are caring for at the time because even *thinking* about your next task takes your concentration away from what you are doing in the present.

It may seem like it would take MORE time to work this way . . . but in reality it takes less time.

When you concentrate fully on one task at a time, you are less likely to miss important details (that force you to start over) and less likely to make dangerous mistakes.

THINK ABOUT IT!

**BE HONEST!**

Are you a multi-tasker? The fact is that most people multi-task at some point during their day.

You may call your friend while you make dinner, or catch up on your inservice reading while you eat your lunch.

Many of these dual activities are harmless. But, multitasking during client care IS NOT!

Maybe you tell yourself that other people can’t do it, but that you are a super awesome multi-tasker, so it’s okay!

- *Think about your typical workday. What activities do you multi-task?*
- *What could go wrong?*
- *Is there a way you can structure your time better so that you can get everything done without multi-tasking?*
RUSHING IS NOT THE ANSWER!

You have a lot to do! And, you have to do it all before the end of your work day. It seems impossible NOT to rush!

Unfortunately, rushing through tasks can cause you to miss important details. Here’s an example of a nursing assistant working in a facility. (However, even if you work in client’s homes, you can probably relate to the situation.)

Jane was late getting on the floor to start her AM care routine. She rushed to gather some supplies and went to her first client’s room. As soon as she got in the room, she hurried through changing the woman’s incontinence brief. Because she was rushing, she didn’t see the reddened area at the base of the woman’s spine that indicated a pressure ulcer may be developing.

Once she got her client sitting upright, she set up a basin and washcloth and helped her wash her face and brush her teeth. Jane was in such a hurry, she never even spoke to her client during the routine. That’s how she missed the fact that the woman was more confused than she was the day before.

Jane hurried down the hall, performing routine tasks for all her clients’ AM care needs. When she was finished she rushed to the computer to do her charting. Because nothing out of the ordinary seemed to happen, and because Jane needed to get back on track, she simply charted that all her clients were WNL (within normal limits).

It’s clear that rushing is one way to miss some really important details! So, how do you do everything you need to do without rushing? You do it by practicing “Time Management.” Here’s how:

- **Set Goals.** Think about your day and try to figure out exactly where your time is going. For example, if you are always a few minutes late to work, you will always feel rushed when you get started. Set a goal to arrive at work at least 15 minutes early and start your day in a relaxed and calm state of mind.

- **Set Your Priorities.** A priority is something that is more important to you than anything else. For example, as a healthcare worker, keeping your clients safe and recognizing changes in your clients’ health status is a big priority. If you are feeling bogged down by tasks that distract you from your priorities, talk to your supervisor about ways you can re-structure your day so you can spend more time on the things that are most important.

- **Make a To-Do List.** This is a list of all the tasks that you need to accomplish. It’s a way of organizing and planning your time so that you get important things done in a certain amount of time. Most successful people will tell you that they make a To Do list every day.

- **Time Yourself.** Wear an alarm wristwatch. Then, if you want to complete a task in 45 minutes, set the alarm for 30 minutes and check your progress. If a task takes longer than you thought, then you will know to budget more time the next time you are scheduled for that task.
SHARPEN YOUR OBSERVATION SKILLS

As a nursing assistant, you play a critical role in making observations about your clients. Your ability to recognize and report important information and any health status changes can be a matter a life or death for your clients.

The best way to make sure you catch every important detail about a client while you are providing care is to come up with a “system.” In other words, create your own “mental checklist” of things you need to observe. Then, go through that same checklist with every client until it becomes a habit.

Here’s an example of how one CNA does this.

Mary works on the rehab unit of a Skilled Nursing Facility. She is generally assigned to provide care for 8 to 10 clients each shift. At the beginning of her shift, Mary visits each client individually and begins to run her mental checklist.

1. First, Mary looks at the ABCs. She makes sure the client is not having any trouble with Airway, Breathing, Cardiac (circulation). She checks the vital signs for any that are out of range or abnormal for that client.

2. The next item on Mary’s mental checklist is MENTAL STATUS. While she is checking vital signs, Mary begins to talk to her client. If Mary is familiar with the client, she can easily see if there is a change in mental status. She relies on the shift report and chart notes when a client is new.

3. Following mental status, Mary observes for PAIN. Clients who are verbal can answer questions about pain. Those who cannot answer can be observed for non-verbal signs, such as moaning, wincing or guarding.

4. The next important detail to observe is ELIMINATION. Mary finds out if the client needs to go to the bathroom or if an incontinence brief needs changing. She observes, measures and records the output.

5. If the client is ambulatory, Mary observes for GAIT AND BALANCE. If the client is bedbound and/or incontinent, Mary inspects the SKIN completely for any signs of breakdown or pressure ulcers.

6. The next items on Mary’s checklist usually happen later in the shift. They are NUTRITION (which includes intake, appetite, and any weight gain or loss), ACTIVITY LEVEL or the need for rest, and any coping issues such as signs of DEPRESSION or hopelessness.

7. The final thing on Mary’s checklist is SAFETY. Although it’s the last thing on her list, it’s something she observes for all day long. Each time she leaves a client, she makes sure the client is in a safe and comfortable position. She places the call bell within reach. And, she makes sure there is a walker, cane or wheelchair available if needed for ambulation.

WHAT’S ON YOUR “MENTAL CHECKLIST?”

Your list may be slightly different from Mary’s, depending on the type of clients you care for. On a separate piece of paper make a list of all the details you want to be sure to observe with each of your clients during every work day.

CONNECT IT NOW!

One reason you may miss important details in work and in life is because you simply let your brain go on "auto pilot."

You get so comfortable driving to work that you feel like you can make a call or text while driving without risk. Or, you’ve done so many bed baths that you find yourself zoning out or thinking about what you are going to do over the weekend.

If you are "auto-pilot" now, it’s time to get your head back in the game! Here are a few things you can do to get more focused:

- Take a walk.
- Stretch.
- Take the stairs.
- Take some deep breaths
- Meditate or pray.

Now, think up a few of your own! What will you do to get your brain in the game the next time you go on auto-pilot?
LOOKING AT DETAILS IN THE CARE PLAN

Care plans are communication tools used to inform the healthcare team what the client needs and how and why it should be done.

**Most care plans include information about:**

- The types of health care services a client needs . . . and how often they are needed.
- The equipment needed to care for the client.
- The nutritional needs of the client (any special diet or safety needs while eating).
- Ways to ensure the client’s safety.

It’s important to review each client’s care plan regularly and discuss any questions you might have with your supervisor.

The “Interventions” are the most important details of the care plan for you. This is where you get information on what to do with your clients to improve or maintain their health status.

**Here’s an example of some common interventions:**

1. Check vital signs before, during, and after activity.
2. Adjust activities. Reduce intensity level or discontinue activities that cause shortness of breath and fatigue.
3. Increase exercise levels gradually. Have the client walk for a few minutes, then rest. Have client walk a little further each time.
4. Provide comfort measures and relief of anxiety.
5. Assist your client to learn and demonstrate appropriate safety measures (get up slowly, dangle feet first, ambulate with assistance, “call don’t fall”).

Be sure to perform your client care according to the details in the care plan. *Don’t make changes without checking with your supervisor.*

Keep in mind that state and/or Joint Commission surveyors will check to see how well your care matches the client’s care plan. So, pay attention to the *details* in each client’s plan of care!

**READ YOUR CLIENT’S CARE PLAN!**

Choose a client you care for right now and thoroughly read through the plan of care. Are there any details there that you missed before? If so, what do you need to do now to make sure your client is getting the care he or she needs?
DETAILS ABOUT PERSONAL PREFERENCES

An important part of customer service is paying attention to the details of each individual client’s personal preferences.

Knowing and respecting your client’s personal preferences shifts the focus of care from the staff-centered approach to a more client-centered approach.

When you learn about your client’s personal preferences, it’s important to both honor those preferences (within reason) and document what you know so that others on the staff can also honor those wishes.

How will you know these details about your client?

If your client appears happy or content (is involved, pays attention, smiles) during an activity, then report what your client seems to enjoy, such as:

- Choosing his or her own clothes to wear.
- Caring for personal belongings.
- Receiving tub bath.
- Receiving shower.
- Receiving bed bath.
- Receiving sponge bath.
- Snacks between meals.
- Staying up past 8:00 p.m.
- Family or significant other involvement in care discussions.
- Use of phone in private.
- Place to lock personal belongings.
- Reading books, newspapers, or magazines.
- Listening to music.
- Keeping up with the news.
- Being around animals such as pets.
- Doing things with groups of people.
- Participating in favorite activities.
- Spending time away from home/the nursing home.
- Spending time outdoors.
- Participating in religious activities or practices.
- Other: ______________________
- Other: ______________________

GET OUT!

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX!

Working with clients in the home often requires coming up with creative solutions to uncommon problems.

- THE PROBLEM: You are assigned to care for Mr. P., a 76 year old man who lives alone. Over the past few months, Mr. P. has had several different aides coming in to help him with his personal care.
- Each time a new aide comes, he has to explain that, first, he likes to drink his coffee and, then, take a short walk. It helps him to move his bowels.
- What you know: You sense that Mr. P. is becoming frustrated that he has to explain this each time someone new comes.
- Get Creative: What will you do? Think of three creative solutions to ease Mr. P’s frustration with this matter.
- Talk about it: Share your ideas with your co-workers and supervisor and find out how they would solve this problem.
DETAILS IN YOUR DOCUMENTATION

Remember that “mental checklist” you made for observing details? Now, it’s time to use that information to document those details.

Make sure your documentation always includes details about:

DAILY MEASUREMENTS
- Vital signs
- Weight
- Intake and Output
- Blood sugar level

OBSERVATIONS
- Observations are the facts and events that you notice as you go about your daily work.

SAFETY ISSUES
- This includes measures you took to ensure a client’s safety and any concerns you have about possible safety hazards in the client’s environment.

CLIENT STATEMENTS & COMPLAINTS
- Document—in their exact words—any pertinent statements your clients make about how they are feeling. This may include statements about pain, appetite or emotions.

UNUSUAL EVENTS
- Report anything out of the ordinary that happens while you are with a client. For example, be sure to document if a client refuses care or if the heat in the client’s room doesn’t work. (Notify your supervisor as soon as possible, too.)

CARRY YOUR “BRAIN” IN YOUR POCKET!

If you care for many clients during a given shift, don’t try to rely on your memory to get all those details into the client’s chart. Instead, carry a piece of paper or a small note pad in your pocket and take notes as you go along!

LEGALLY SPEAKING!

If you provide care for clients without documenting the details thoroughly and carefully—your employer may not get reimbursed for your work.

In contrast, if you document care that you did not perform, your employer may not get reimbursed, and WILL POSSIBLY be fined for the false records.
FINAL THOUGHTS ABOUT DETAILS

- Attention to detail starts with the input you receive from your senses. But to make the most of that input, you have to have good concentration and a sharp memory!

- Your senses can be easily overloaded. That’s why it’s important to develop your “selective attention.” Selective attention is when you take control of your brain and block out the sensory input that is just “noise” and zero in on the input that matters.

- Multi-tasking and rushing through tasks is a sure fire way to miss important details about your clients. You’ve probably never been told to “slow down” at work, but your are hearing it now! SLOW DOWN! Take your time and complete each task carefully and thoroughly!

- Being able to pay attention to details requires you to know certain things about the body. For example, you may miss a small detail like a slight increase in temperature and pulse if you didn’t know that it could be a dangerous sign of infection. It’s important to understand the “why” behind everything you do. That will help you prioritize those details when you observe them.

- You can take steps to improve your concentration and memory. This can help enhance your attention to detail. Just remember, it’s a good idea to have a back-up plan! Keep your “brain” in your pocket and make notes as you go along. That way you’ll be sure to include all the details of your client care in your documentation.

- Before you document anything, always double check to make sure you are in the right chart. Remember, the chart is a legal document that the rest of the healthcare team relies on to get information about the client’s health status. If your client can ambulate independently in the room, but you document that note in another client’s chart (who very possible can’t ambulate independently), you may unknowingly set in motion a change in the care plan and a change in the reimbursement your employer receives for the care you provide.

- Ultimately, attention to detail lies in your being knowledgeable about your job and your clients—and in being careful and thoughtful in everything you observe and document.
Are you “In the Know” about attention to detail? Circle the best choice or fill in your answer. Then check your answers with your supervisor!

1. The main problem with relying on your senses to take in details about your clients is that your senses can easily be:
   A. Wrong.    C. Overloaded.

2. Memories stored here are easily lost if you are interrupted.
   A. Sensory memory.   C. Long term memory.
   B. Short term Memory.   D. None of the above.

3. Your client tells you she prefers to sleep late and skip breakfast. She likes to have a small snack around 10 am when she wakes up. You should:
   A. Document that your client refuses to eat breakfast.
   B. Explain that breakfast is the most important meal of the day.
   C. Tell her it’s easier for you if she just gets up at 8 am like everyone else.
   D. Document her preference so that other staff members can honor her wishes.

4. Which of the following can decrease your ability to concentrate?
   A. Lack of sleep.   C. Stress.
   B. Multiple distractions.   D. All of the above.

5. True or False
   Multi-tasking is a great way to get more done in less time.

6. True or False
   You should strive to memorize every detail of client care, including your clients’ daily vital signs and other important observations.

7. True or False
   A great way to improve your concentration and memory is to play games.

8. True or False
   The most valuable nursing assistant knows how to do everything very quickly.

9. True or False
   If you forget your client’s pulse rate (and did not write it down), it’s best to just document a number that is in the client’s usual range.

10. True or False
    Your ability to pay attention to details can mean the difference between life or death for your clients.