

UNIT 2 THE THERAPEUTIC APPROACH

CHAPTER 4

COPING SKILLS FOR THE MEDICAL ASSISTANT

Overview

Medical assisting students define stress and the physiological effects of stress on the body. The stressors common in the ambulatory care setting are identified, and coping mechanisms for dealing with each are discussed. The importance of setting realistic short- and long-range goals is emphasized as a primary method of reducing stress. Students are encouraged to examine their own personal goals and aspirations. Inner- and outer-directed personality traits and the positive or negative influence of each on making effective life decisions are explored. The concept of burnout is introduced; students discover personality traits that promote burnout and identify ways to reduce the risk of burning out in the workplace environment. Burnout does not occur suddenly, as does stress.

Lesson Plan

I. LEARNING OUTCOMES	ABHES	CAAHEP
A. Define, spell, and pronounce the key terms as presented in the glossary.		
B. Analyze the difference between stress and stressors.		
C. Describe the three categories of stressors.		
D. Discuss Hans Selye's General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS) theory.		
E. Differentiate between short-duration and long-duration stress.		
F. Describe the body's response to stress as reflected by the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems.	MA.A.1.2.b	I.C.2, 5
G. Analyze stress in the work environment and discuss ways to eliminate or cope with it.		XI.A.1, 2
H. Model ways a positive attitude may reduce the level and duration of stress.		
I. Discuss physical illnesses and psychological symptoms of stress on the body.		I. C.7
J. Describe characteristics of prolonged stress.		I.C.7
K. Describe the four stages of burnout.		
L. Identify persons most vulnerable to burnout.		I.C.6
M. Discuss general stress management techniques and identify three that you will implement into your lifestyle.		I.C.8
N. Differentiate between long-range and short-range goals.		
O. Analyze the professionalism questions and apply them to this chapter's content.	MA.A.1.11.b	X.C.2

II. PROFESSIONALISM QUESTIONS

- A. Communication
 1. Did you provide appropriate responses/feedback?
 2. Did you display appropriate body language?
- B. Presentation
 1. Did you display a calm, professional, and caring manner?
- C. Competency
 1. Did you display sound judgment?
 2. Did you remain calm in a crisis?
 3. Do you recognize the effect of stress on all persons involved in emergency situations?

- D. Initiative
 - 1. Did you show initiative?
 - 2. Were you flexible and dependable?
 - 3. Were you respectful of others?
 - 4. Did you assist coworkers when appropriate?
- E. Integrity
 - 1. Did you work within your scope of practice?
 - 2. Did you maintain your moral and ethical standards?

III. REFERENCES

- A. Lindh, Wilburta Q., Pooler, Marilyn S., Tamparo, Carol D., Dahl, Barbara M., & Morris, Julie A., *Delmar's Comprehensive Medical Assisting: Administrative and Clinical Competencies*, 5e
- B. See text Chapter 4, References/Bibliography
- C. Any other teacher-preferred reference material

IV. VISUAL AIDS

- A. Computer access to identified Internet resources
- B. Any other teacher-preferred visual aids (PowerPoint, etc.)

V. EQUIPMENT AND MATERIALS

- A. Computer, TV monitor, and Internet access
- B. Whiteboard or overhead projector
- C. Markers and transparencies
- D. See IV: Visual Aids

VI. SAFETY

- A. Basic classroom procedures
- B. Take care not to overschedule work and appointments that could cause carelessness, mistakes, and mental and physical ills
- C. Stressed employees and patients are not a good mix; irritability may cause medical or legal problems

VII. PREPARATION

- A. Arrange for visual aids equipment
- B. Collect materials
- C. Review Chapter 4 in the text, the Study Guide, and the Instructor's Manual

VIII. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS/ACTIONS

- A. Read Learning Outcomes in the text with students to introduce the chapter
- B. Ask, "What strategies do you, as students, use to cope with the stress you face? How do you organize your assignments? What study habits do you have that are helpful?" Write responses on the board
- C. Brainstorm the above list with the class. Discuss how each can help control stress
- D. Discuss the opening scenario and identify other possible stressors that could occur during the day

IX. PRESENTATION

- A. What Is Stress?
 - 1. The body's response to mental and physical change is termed stress
 - 2. What constitutes stress is highly individual and depends on personality type
 - 3. Differentiate between eustress and distress ("stressed" spelled backwards is "desserts")
 - 4. Three categories of stressors
 - a. Frustrations
 - b. Conflicts
 - c. Pressure
 - 5. Hans Selye GAS Theory
 - 7. Discuss negative and positive effects of stress on the body
 - 8. Define and differentiate between short-duration and long-duration stress
- B. The Body's Response to Stress
 - 1. Sympathetic nervous system prepares the body for "fight or flight"
 - 2. Parasympathetic nervous system returns the body back to normal after the stressor has been removed
 - 3. Review Figure 4-1, Hans Selye's GAS theory, which proposes that four stages are involved in adapting to stress

- C. Factors Causing Stress
 - 1. Understand the cause
 - a. Overwhelming situations
 - b. Round peg in square hole
 - c. Traumatic events on the job
 - 2. Stress in the work environment
 - a. Physical environment
 - b. Management style
 - c. Difficult coworkers
 - d. Choices affecting a positive attitude
 - (1) Be respectful of others
 - (2) Be a diligent worker
 - (3) Be willing to learn
 - (4) Be honest
 - (5) Be willing to assume responsibility for one's actions
 - (6) Express appropriate humor
 - (7) Exemplify an attitude of humility
 - (8) Be goal directed
 - (9) Understand Maslow's hierarchy of needs (See Chapter 5)
 - e. Failure to meet needs
 - f. Job instability
 - g. Technological changes
 - h. Organization size
 - i. Overspecialization
 - 3. Assign or discuss the Critical Thinking box (Practice in Time Management Analysis)
- D. Effect of Prolonged Stress—Burnout
 - 1. Define burnout
 - 2. Stages of burnout
 - a. Honeymoon stage
 - b. Reality stage
 - c. Dissatisfaction stage
 - d. Sad state stage
 - 3. Results of burnout
 - a. Physical illnesses
 - b. Psychological effects
 - 4. Persons most vulnerable to burnout
 - a. People with inadequate social support networks, poorly nourished, sleep deprived, and the physically ill
 - b. Certain age groups or life stages
 - c. Certain personality types
- E. General Stress Management Techniques
 - 1. Say “no”
 - 2. Prioritize work or delegate it within the limits of your authority
 - 3. Change work-related environment
 - 4. Evaluate negative feelings
 - 5. Look at work as a “fun” experience and an adventure
 - 6. Establish long- and short-term realistic goals
 - 7. Develop strong social support networks
 - 8. Embark on a program of relaxation and meditation
 - 9. Start an exercise regime
 - 10. Assign or discuss the Critical Thinking box: Self-Evaluation
- F. Goal Setting as a Stress Reliever
 - 1. Outer-directed people versus inner-directed people
 - 2. Value of goal-oriented employees
 - 3. What is a goal?
 - 4. Value of goals for self-actualization
 - 5. Long-range goals may take three to five years to accomplish

6. Short-range goals reassemble the required activities of long-range goals into smaller, manageable time segments
7. Give examples of long- and short-range goals
8. Long- and short-range goals help make changes in our lives
9. Goals make life interesting
10. We can all reach goals successfully

X. APPLICATION

- A. Use the Learning Outcomes at the beginning of Chapter 4 in the text as the basis for questions to assess comprehension
- B. See the Classroom Activities section below for numerous application activities
- C. Assign students to complete Chapter 4 in the Study Guide

XI. EVALUATION

- A. Evaluate any assigned application activities
- B. Grade responses to Chapter 4 in the Study Guide

Classroom Activities

1. Encourage students to list the priorities in their lives, such as activities, assignments, and social functions. Give them blank calendars to record all of their important dates—for example, when assignments are due or when they should study for tests. This activity will help them get started on their own personal time/stress management program by helping them to plan their time and avoid the last-minute rush in getting things done. It should show them the basic steps in reducing stress.
2. Invite a health care worker who has been working in the field for a number of years to speak to the students about how he or she avoids burnout. Discuss what types of measures they employ, such as taking vacations, taking breaks, socializing with fellow workers, and so on.
3. Have students share in a discussion about their hobbies or favorite leisure activities and the importance of time for self.
4. Assign students to write about three long-term goals they have for themselves, including three short-term goals that will help them to achieve each.
5. List as many community resources as you can think of that could be beneficial in reducing stress if you were to participate. Examples include classes offered by the YMCA/YWCA, local hospitals, community centers, sports teams, etc.
6. Critical Thinking boxes are provided within the chapter content to stimulate critical thinking discussion and the skills necessary for medical assisting.
7. Explore the Case Studies provided in this chapter for additional discussion and enhancement of principles pertinent to chapter content.

Answers to Critical Thinking Boxes

Practice in Time Management Analysis

List all of the tasks you do in a typical day. Beside each task write down how many minutes/hours you spend on each task. At the conclusion of the exercise, draw a histogram showing the percentage of each day spent on each task. This will quickly show where you spend most of your time. How could you save time? Develop a plan to reduce time spent in nonproductive, unessential activities.

These answers will be very individualized and personal. You may want to spend class time discussing how you can save time; e.g., complete each task at one setting, organize and complete similar tasks at one time, set a particular time of the day to complete tasks that require concentration to prevent disruptions. You may also want to spend time in class discussing how to develop a plan to reduce time spent in nonproductive or unessential activities.

Self-Evaluation

- List several situations in your life that are stressful. Select the one that is most stressful.
- List as many things as possible about the situation that make it stressful to you.
- How would you change each of the things you have listed to make them less stressful?
- List the things you “could do” to effect the changes you listed.

- Rank the items in your “could do” list in terms of achievability.
- Select one or two of the items that are achievable and discuss them with a classmate. Now attempt to put them into practice for a week. Report back to your classmate on how effective these items were in reducing stress in your life.

The title “Self-Evaluation” reflects the nature of this exercise. It is very personal and students may not be comfortable sharing with others. Students could be assigned to work in pairs or small groups and be accountable only to each other to share their findings. This approach may be less threatening.

Answers to Case Studies

Case Study 4-1

Refer to the scenario at the beginning of the chapter.

1. What work can Ellen Armstrong, CMA (AAMA), organize the night before the clinic manager is out of town, leaving Ellen in charge of the reception area and the ever-ringing telephone the next day?

Prepare for the next day as much as possible before leaving the clinic. This might include collecting any supplies that might be needed for the next day, printing out the schedule of patients and pulling charts if using paper charts, or checking to be sure that EMRs are in order.

2. How might Ellen relieve stress as the hectic day progresses?

Relax once off duty, eat nutritiously, and get plenty of rest the night before. During the next day, Ellen should take brief breaks, change positions if sitting or standing for long periods of time, complete each task as it occurs, make notes of tasks that have not been completed or need to be cared for, smile before answering the telephone, greet each patient warmly, respect coworkers, and work as a member of a team.

Case Study 4-2

Ellen Armstrong, CMA (AAMA), has been employed for five years as an administrative medical assistant with providers Lewis and King. Ellen is a perfectionist and has pushed herself to achieve many of her short- and long-term goals. The clinic staff has become aware that Ellen does not have a sense of humor lately. She seems frustrated and irritable, and she is becoming critical of herself and others. Ellen has felt physically and emotionally exhausted, yet she continues to focus on her high standard of job performance; however, work is becoming a chore. At the end of the day, if everything has not been completed to her satisfaction, she feels like a failure.

1. Do you feel Ellen is stressed or experiencing burnout? On what do you base your conclusions?

Ellen is demonstrating the classic signs and symptoms of burnout, which include:

- She is a perfectionist.
- She has a decreased sense of humor.
- She displays frustration and irritability.
- She is critical of herself and others.
- She is physically and emotionally exhausted, yet continues to push herself.
- Her work has become a chore.
- She feels like a failure if everything is not completed at the end of the day to her satisfaction.

2. What might Ellen do to differentiate these two conditions?

Ellen needs to take time for self-analysis by asking herself some hard questions. These questions must be answered truthfully and completely. Spend some time online defining stress and burnout and the manifestations of each. Evaluate if any of these characteristics apply directly to her.

3. What changes might Ellen implement to resolve this problem?

- List negative words or phrases often used, and then substitute neutral replacements.
- Create job diversity: take a different route to work for a change; enter the clinic through a different door; change work routine where appropriate; investigate the possibility of a different work schedule.
- Become creative: change work area décor by adding a new calendar; change family photo on desk, add foliage or a silk plant to the area.
- Revisit short- and long-term goals and make adjustments where necessary; be sure all goals are realistic and attainable.

- Pay more attention to personal habits: change eating habits; exercise more; get more rest and sleep; renew old friendships; go to lunch with coworkers.
- Implement time management techniques.
- Delegate responsibility to others who are capable.

Answers to Certification Review

1. a. It does not occur suddenly
2. c. 4 stages
3. c. burnout
4. a. honeymoon, reality, dissatisfaction, sad state
5. c. feelings of accomplishment and pride in work
6. b. they are divided into a series of short-range goals
7. d. alarm, fight-or-flight, exhaustion, return-to-normal
8. a. frustrations, conflicts, pressure
9. a. returns the body to normal after the stressor has been removed
10. d. experience self-actualization

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