



# Self care:

maintaining patients'  
dignity

*Lesson 12*

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## Vocabulary List

**at ease** – *idiom.* comfortable, relaxed.

**bowel** – *n.* the intestine.

**catheter** – *n.* a tube passed through the body for evacuating or injecting fluids in body cavities.

**dignity** – *n.* the presence of poise and self-respect.

**distant** – *adj.* far away in space or time, remote.

**interact** – *v.* to act in such a way as to have an effect on each other.

**intimate** – *adj.* familiar, close, personal, private.

**monitor** – *v.* to observe and check the progress or quality of something over a period of time.

**multiplicity** – *n.* a large number or variety.

**paraplegic** – *n.* a person unable to move or have feeling in the legs and lower body.

**perceptive** – *adj.* having or showing sensitive insight.

**recognize** – *v.* to acknowledge validity, genuineness or character.

**reliable** – *adj.* dependable, able to be trusted.

**sensitivity** – *n.* the quality to quickly detect or respond to slight changes, signals or influences.

*Reference Notes*

## Reading

### Self Care: How to Maintain Patients' Dignity

*"The care these nurses give me and the **sensitivity** they show in taking care of my body helps what is a very difficult situation, and really makes me feel like a normal human being." – Doug Harvey*

5 Karla and Julia are home care nurses who tend to a variety of patients in a **multiplicity** of situations. These nurses **interact** with patients on a very **intimate** level. Carl, who is in the hospital quite sick with cancer, needs his **catheter** changed and **bowels** emptied. Kathy, a 90-year-old woman still living on her own, whose health is failing, receives daily visits from a nurse to  
10 **monitor** her heart rate and blood pressure and bathe her a few times a week.

Doug Harvey is a special case. He's a 55-year-old man who has recently had a big change in his life. About six months ago, he was driving home from playing golf with his friends and was in a terrible car accident that left him  
15 paralyzed from the neck down. He was in the hospital for three months before being discharged and allowed to go home. How would he cope with these changes? Soon after he returned home, he decided that 24-hour nursing care was the best way to help him adjust to life as a **paraplegic**. Having professional, qualified nurses on hand would allow Doug to maintain his  
20 human **dignity**.

Doug is lucky. He has a **reliable** team of nurses, who work in pairs, to care for him. It took some time for Doug, who had previously been very independent, to become comfortable allowing strangers to tend to his every  
25 need, especially when it came to more intimate acts like dressing him, bathing him, changing his catheter and emptying his bowels.

Julia and Karla were Doug's favorite pair. He liked them because they **recognized** that he was a person before he was a patient and showed him a lot  
30 of respect. When Julia dressed him in the mornings, she always asked him

what he wanted to wear that day, right down to which socks he preferred. And neither Julia nor Karla was awkward about his body. These nurses, trained professionals, were **at ease** with Doug's body and allowed him the dignity of being a human being in a human body, even though he was paralyzed.

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When bathing him, neither Karla nor Julia made small talk to cover up what might have been awkward moments. And they were not silent either. They were both very **perceptive** and tried to sense what Doug's mood was that day. What Doug appreciated most about being bathed by these nurses was that they didn't treat his body as if it were an object. They weren't cold or **distant** but treated him with appropriate tenderness without crossing any patient-nurse boundaries.

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The attention and concern of nurses allow Doug and others to continue to live their lives with human dignity and assure them top-quality care as they adapt to challenging situations and life changes.

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## Vocabulary Exercise

Fill-in-the-Blank – complete each sentence with the correct word suggested in the list. You may have to change the word form to fit the sentence.

**paraplegic    dignity    distant    discharge    interact    intimate**  
**multiplicity    perceptive    reliable    sensitivity**


1. When the baby became ill, friends showed great \_\_\_\_\_ in discussing its progress with the mother.
2. The pharmacy sells a \_\_\_\_\_ of OTC drugs suitable for treating a headache.
3. The business partners knew they would need to \_\_\_\_\_ well with each other and their clients to make their new venture successful.
4. The relationship between mother and child is an \_\_\_\_\_ one.
5. He was \_\_\_\_\_ from the airforce with numerous medals.
6. During the soldier's memorial service, his family behaved with great \_\_\_\_\_.
7. The home care nurse was very \_\_\_\_\_, arriving promptly and taking good care of the patient.
8. With encouragement, even a \_\_\_\_\_ may achieve great things.
9. Parents can be very \_\_\_\_\_, sometimes knowing what their children need without having to be told.
10. It is difficult to develop a close friendship with someone who remains \_\_\_\_\_.

## Comprehension Exercise

Multiple Choice – Answer the questions or paraphrase each sentence/underlined phrase with the best choice.

1. A variety of patients in a multiplicity of situations.
  - a. of different backgrounds and medical histories
  - b. with all kinds of problems and needs
  - c. in a chaotic hospital
  
2. How would he cope with these changes?
  - a. adjust to
  - b. accept
  - c. survive
  
3. Having professional, qualified nurses on hand would allow Doug to maintain his human dignity.
  - a. available
  - b. on shift
  - c. on staff
  
4. When bathing him, neither Karla nor Julia made small talk to cover up what might have been awkward moments.
  - a. made some jokes
  - b. whispered in private
  - c. made light conversation
  
5. They recognized that he was a person before he was a patient.
  - a. They knew who he was before he had the accident.
  - b. They see him as an individual, not just another patient.
  - c. They had to find out who he was before giving him medical treatment.
  
6. The nurses were at ease with Doug's body.
  - a. He was so light they could lift him with no problem.
  - b. It made no difference if it were Doug's body or someone else's body.
  - c. They were familiar with Doug and were comfortable in doing what they needed to do.

## Clinically Speaking



Practice the conversations with a classmate. Pay attention to the words in bold face. Check a dictionary for new words or idioms and add them to your reference notes.

1. Patient: What do you mean you have to **change my catheter**?

Nurse: The fluid from that bottle has stopped flowing so it **looks as if** the tube **is blocked**. You need the fluid, so we are going to change your catheter. Then everything will be fine again.

2. Patient: The doctor says that I'm paralyzed **from the neck down**, but I don't feel any pain. I feel fine. What does he mean?

Nurse: I'm afraid that the reason you don't feel any pain is because your nerves are **not working**. It also means that **you'll find you** can not move your arms or legs either.

3. Patient: The nurse told me that the doctor wants to **monitor my heart rate and blood pressure**. Does that mean I have to have an operation?

Nurse: Oh no, I just take your pulse by **placing a finger** on your wrist. I can also monitor or check your BP by **placing a cuff** around your upper arm and listening for your pulse with this **stethoscope** that I have around my neck.

4. Patient: I'm told that nurses **interact with** their patients **on a very intimate level**. I don't feel comfortable with that.

Nurse: You've no need to be concerned. It just means that we have to do certain things for you, such as helping you have a **bowel movement**. Normally you would **see to this in the privacy of** your own bathroom.

5. Patient: The nurse says they are going to **empty my bowels**. Does that mean surgery?

Doctor: No, we will **administer medicine by mouth**, but if that doesn't **do the trick**, we will **introduce** warm fluid **into your rectum** to remove any material there.

6. Doug: **I'm not a prude** but I feel very embarrassed if a female nurse washes me.

Nurse: We quite understand, and **if a male nurse is available, we'll certainly ask him**. However, most of us are female, and **we are used to caring for everyone**, so please don't feel uncomfortable.

## Main Ideas

Comprehend the given statement. Try to interpret in your own words. You may use several shorter statements in your interpretation, as long as the main idea is delivered.

1. There is a very personal, intimate relationship between patient and nurse.

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2. Affording dignity to one's patients is the characteristic of a good home care nurse, or any nurse for that matter.

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3. The care these nurses give and the sensitivity they show in taking care of Doug's body help what is a very difficult situation for him.

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4. Routine tasks such as monitoring pulse rates and blood pressure may seem simple, but their efficient execution can make the difference literally between life and death.

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5. A life-altering event such as paralysis not only produces major medical problems but also causes emotional and psychological dilemmas.

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6. For a nurse helping a patient who once was an independent person and who is now a very dependent one, it is important to use diplomacy in all tasks.

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