



# Introduction

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## Why do I need to learn clinical skills?

As a nursing student beginning the first year of your course you require theoretical knowledge of health and illness to explain how an individual person functions at a variety of levels, from the biological to the social and psychological. You will also learn some of the fundamental principles of caring and treatment, and through this become aware that nursing is a very practical profession, encompassing a large number of clinical skills that must be mastered. This theory and practice together constitute what you are required to learn and these are the **skills** that are needed for a term that you may have heard: 'fitness for practice' or 'fitness for purpose,' which, basically, means that at the end of your nursing education you have the skills, knowledge, and attitudes required to work as a nurse in your chosen branch.

In the first year of the programme (referred to as the common foundation programme), there are common clinical skills that you are required to master prior to entering the second and subsequent years of your course (usually called the 'branch' years). This book has been specifically designed to enable you to learn and perform these valuable and necessary skills and give you the best start.

## Which skills am I learning?

The skills included here are a result of asking a large number of universities that teach first-year nursing which skills they include. Some universities differ very slightly in which skills they include in the first year, however, in

general you will find that you will learn almost all, if not all, of the skills in the book. We have also ensured that we address the NMC Essential Skills Clusters for year one to prime you for the rest of your course. We have also asked lecturers, practitioners, and experienced students to design an 'ideal' clinical skills book and this is the result – all the skills you need in exactly the right way to learn them.

## Getting started: what you need to know

As a future nurse you need to understand not just *how* to undertake a skill but *why* and *when*, and to think about the *patients* you are working with and their individual circumstances. There are certain essential theoretical elements to learning clinical skills, to which we refer throughout this book. However, you need to do some extra work too. In no particular order these elements are:

Firstly, you must use this book alongside a good quality **anatomy and physiology** book. We endeavour to make as many helpful links and summaries as we can; however, we can't include everything without writing a book twice the size! Only you are responsible for learning the biology that you need to know as a good nurse.

Secondly, you will be introduced to the idea of **evidence-based practice** – put simply this is the idea that no nurse would ever undertake a procedure without checking that she or he knows and understands why it is done that particular way. Just as the way you learn the rules of the road so as not to crash a car, or learn about food safety so as not to give your family food poisoning, so too a nurse learns the 'rules' of clinical skills. You will see references to

articles, guidelines and protocols in the text – use them, and also refer to our online resource centre, where we will update you about major developments.

Thirdly, clinical skills are not simply tasks we carry out on anonymous people. Our patients are whole human beings with multidimensional lives. We use important nursing theories, such as the Activities of Living of Roper, Logan, and Tierney (2000), and the concept of **holistic care** to ensure that when we perform a clinical task, we do it in a sensitive manner, caring for the person and treating them with respect.

Roper, Logan, and Tierney's twelve activities of living form the basis of many care plans and nursing assessments. These activities are well known, not just in nursing but also in occupational therapy, and have been chosen as the basic structure for this book. For more information on these, refer to Holland *et al.* (2008). For the purposes of this book, we have identified ten of these activities for particular attention:

- Maintaining a safe environment
- Communication
- Breathing
- Eating and drinking
- Eliminating
- Personal cleansing and dressing
- Controlling body temperature
- Mobilizing
- Working and playing
- Dying

The remaining two activities from Roper, Logan, and Tierney's 12 activities of living – expressing sexuality and sleeping – have an influence on many of the other activities and we have, therefore, incorporated these as appropriate throughout the text.

Last but not least, there are some **legal and professional requirements** that you must meet. For every skill you undertake, you must think of patient safety and ethical considerations, including:

- **Consent** – permission from the patient to have the procedure performed on them
- **Capacity** – the ability to give you consent, which is compromised through mental illness, loss of consciousness, age, and immaturity, and learning disability
- Correct identification of the patient (no one wants to be given the wrong drug!)

- Understanding that you are accountable (responsible) for all of your nursing actions
- Paying attention to health and safety – you must ensure that your actions and use of equipment are safe and correct

You must read the professional code of conduct for nurses (NMC 2008) and local policies and procedures.

On one level, legal and professional practice means having clean hands, using gloves when necessary, asking permission to perform a procedure, but on another it means being motivated to learn anatomy, reading new clinical guidelines and thinking all the time, 'Is my care as good as it could be?'

## So how do I learn all this?

In light of the above, as a new nursing student, whether you have undertaken clinical tasks before in a previous job or never at all, you must read about the skill to learn why the skill is necessary, what part of the body you are dealing with, what evidence justifies your action, and what the patient may be thinking and feeling. These topics will be covered in many lectures and may often feature in assignments and in exams. On a more practical note, you also need to work out what equipment is required, the actual performance of the task, and then the 'aftercare', which can include documentation and record keeping. Many of these elements are taught in clinical skills laboratories.

## University and placements

It is current practice to learn a range of clinical skills first at university. This will provide you with some confidence and a degree of competence to take to your placement. You will have time to practice and refine the skill usually on a mannequin (and perhaps on your classmates!) before you use the skill for real on a patient.

Some skills can be tricky to master the first time and you will need to practice these over and over again. It is common for students to make mistakes, especially the first time at attempting something new. By practising skills on mannequins in the university, with your lecturer for support in a safe environment, it does not matter if

mistakes are made. You will find that you can learn from mistakes and will probably never make the same mistakes again. It is important, therefore, to practice, practice, practice, because you can improve and learn all the time until you feel comfortable performing clinical skills at university. By the time you go on placement, you will be ready to do it for real.

Learning the skills does not end with you using them for the first time on a real patient. This is where you can start to reflect on your performance and identify areas for further improvement. You will learn about reflection in nursing during your three years of education and there is a great deal of literature available on how to do it. Our advice is that after performing clinical skills, this is an ideal time to carry out reflection using a chosen model of reflection. This can be discussed with your mentor and included in your clinical record of achievement. Such reflection and records of evidence can help to show your achievement of some of the first-year clinical 'competencies'. Your university needs to provide proof that you have achieved these as well as the clinical skills clusters, in order to move onto your branch programme.

## Using this book

You will have gathered by now that learning clinical skills is not quite as simple as learning how to 'do' something. This book has been specifically designed to help you learn practice and appropriate theory in **one** place. You will have seen in the opening pages just how the features in this book have been designed to help you (see the walk-through preface). Here are some useful short points!

## Finding information

Each chapter follows a similar layout so that you can quickly move to the most relevant point for focused reading, whether it's theoretical background information or practical guidance. We hope that you will enjoy browsing when reading the book for the first time or for revision. To help you write assignments we have included hyperlinks to cited articles where possible on our online resource centre – these will easily take you to the original articles for further reading. You will also find it useful to browse the references to get a sense of the sources of information

we used in order to identify suitable literature for your own essays and group work.

## Preparing to use a skill

You can use this as an aide-memoire in preparation for the performance of a procedure by reading a chapter and then printing a checklist from our website. You can also use these checklists as tools to help reflect on and evaluate a particular performance. In addition, the website provides access to videos, presentations, photographs, and more real-life scenarios. All of these activities are designed to improve engagement with clinical skills, ultimately leading to their mastery.

Some of the skills involve the use of equipment that you may not have used before. To help you with this, there are a number of pictures included in the book for each skill to help you become familiar with what the equipment looks like. In addition to this, the website that accompanies the book shows photographs and video clips to help follow the steps of certain procedures.

## Scenarios

Reality checks are provided in abundance through real-life scenarios – we advise that you read these, consider what you would do, either in your head or on paper, decide on your course of action and only **then** read our suggested answers!

## Mentors and lecturers

This book is designed to be useful to students, their mentors, and university lecturers, for different reasons.

**For mentors** unsure of what constitutes the current curriculum in the first year, this book gives an excellent coverage of the skills expected to be achieved by students, and may help the mentor to guide and direct the student as to what is to be learned as well as how it is to be learned. Using the resources of the website and the step-by-step approach to performance outlined in the book, the mentor and student can mentally and verbally rehearse the performance of a task prior to practising with patients. This will improve the student's confidence, and

should impact positively on patient comfort and safety. The checklists and detailed descriptions can help the mentor focus **objectively** on the skill while providing feedback to students on their performance.

**For lecturers,** clinical demonstrators, and simulation laboratory technicians based in a university, this book has many helpful features.

## Recommended reading

We have worked extremely hard to ensure that you can reliably recommend this text to your first-year students to truly support their learning needs both at university and placement. We cover the skills that first-year students must learn, we do not assume prior knowledge, we explain material at the right level, and give lots of practical tips via illustrations, scenarios and a website.

## Illustrations

Useful illustrations can be found in the ‘teachers’ section of our online resource centre for you to download into your virtual learning environment (VLE) and use in lectures.

## Scenarios

Each chapter includes useful scenarios for all patients’ needs, be they children, adults, or those with mental health issues or learning disabilities (there are a total of 80 scenarios in the book). Our online resource centre has over 40 further interactive scenarios and 50 interactive self-test questions.

## Additional tips for teaching on our online resource centre

This has further tips to help you teach, including:

- Planning simulated learning experiences
- Using our online skills checklists to assess performance objectively
- Using video clips to represent an ideal or ‘model’ demonstration of a skill with which to compare actual student performance

- Guidance for the construction of ‘objective structured clinical evaluations’ or OSCEs, which are increasingly used in universities to assess clinical performance


## Conclusion

In conclusion, this book is a vital tool for the acquisition of clinical skills presented at a time when it is increasingly important that students acquire these to a required standard. This is also a time to be aware that patient safety and comfort are paramount and that preparation for practice and reflection on practice are as important as the actual practice itself. Acquiring clinical skills is, therefore, an important component of any clinical placement. This coincides with an emerging paradox: clinical placements demand more skilful performances from practitioners while at the same time they are becoming so busy and pressurized that the time allowed for acquiring these skills is greatly reduced. This book, therefore, is an invaluable support for first-year students and will provide guidance and facilitate improved performance through the tools of reflection, and will be welcomed by the profession.

## References

- Holland K, Jenkins J, Solomon J, and Whittam S (2008). *Applying the Roper-Logan-Tierney Model in Practice*, 2nd edn. Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh.
- NMC (2008). *The Code: Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics for Nurses and Midwives*. Nursing and Midwifery Council, London.
- Roper N, Logan WW, and Tierney AJ (2000). *The Roper-Logan-Tierney Model of Nursing: Based on Activities of Living*. Churchill Livingstone, Edinburgh.

## Useful further reading and websites

Check  [www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/docherty/](http://www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/docherty/) for changes and new developments. Updated research, guidelines, or equipment will be added every three months.

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## Mandatory skills

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### Skills

- 2.1 **Communication**
- 2.2 **Moving and handling**
- 2.3 **The management of aggression and violence**
- 2.4 **Infection prevention and control**
- 2.5 **Resuscitation**
- 2.6 **Administration of medicines**

### Introduction

We have created this chapter because these **mandatory** skills underpin good nursing practice and are required for the safety of people in care and those who care for them. Hence, these skills tend to be the compulsory skills that placement providers expect **first-year students** to be familiar with **prior to their first placement**. It is, therefore, *essential* that you read this chapter before you do anything else.

This chapter aims to give you a brief outline of each skill, explaining its importance before providing separate introductory sections on each skill, for example, Section 2.1 on communication. You will also see that these skills are further developed in separate chapters, for example, Chapter 4 on communication, where more detailed information allows you to become more fully familiar with and competent in that skill. *Note, it should be recognized that these short pieces only give guidance on all of these skills; full practical training in these skills is also required, particularly resuscitation, drug administration, and dealing with violence and aggression.*

### Mandatory skills

- Communication
- Moving and handling
- Violence and aggression
- Infection control
- Resuscitation
- Administration of medicines