Using open and closed questions

Nurses often ask too many closed questions. Closed questions tend to invite very short answers and in difficult relationships they may not aid in opening up the conversation. However, closed questions can be useful for finding specific information and for bringing a difficult conversation to a close.

Open questions invite more thorough answers, and encourage the patient to divulge information and explain their emotions and behaviours more. Nurses should try to ask open and closed questions at appropriate moments. Asking questions of the right kind can help nurses to obtain right information and build a better rapport with the patient.

Open ended questions have been associated with developing trust, being less threatening, allowing a free response. Open ended questions can also be more time consuming, obtain to much information, and may require more effort on the part of the nurse.

Closed ended questions are dichotomous questions often leading to yes or no answer. Closed-ended questions generally include probing, or leading questions. These questions are can mostly answered in a few words. If used to much they can deliver incomplete responses, can be to leading, result in misleading conclusions, discourages disclosure and may even threaten the patient.

Examples of Open ended Questions:

- How may/can I help you?
- Where have you looked already?
- What kind of information about your care are you looking for?
- What would you like to know about the hospital?
- When you said you are hurt, what do you mean?
- What do you mean by being frustrated?
- What is it you want to know about and then I can try and help?
- How might you use the information I have given you?
- How will it help you?
- Where did you hear about your illness?
- Tell me how this whole thing came about?
- What happened that made it all stop?
- What are you trying to understand?
- Where else have you looked?

Examples of close ended questions

- May I help you?
- Can you give me more information?
- Can you describe the kind of information you want?
- Can you give me an example?
- Are you looking for the nurse?
- Is there something specific about [topic], you are looking for?
- Is there any other information that you need?
- Is that what you are looking for?
- Does this answer your question?
