

Inference

Inference is the process of drawing logical conclusions based on available information, observations, and experience. The ability to make sound inferences is crucial for effective problem-solving, decision-making, and understanding complex situations.

To make inferences:

- Use a logical thinking process and begin with facts, available information, and your own experiences.
- Look for patterns and connections to gain a deeper understanding.
- Be mindful of any biases your own experiences might bring into your reasoning.
- Draw conclusions based on the available information and your interpretations.



Keep in Mind: Inferences are educated guesses that could be wrong. For the highest probability of success, verify information, seek out additional data, be aware of changing circumstances, and consider your own biases.

To improve your inference skills, practice the following:

- Train yourself to notice patterns, relationships, and contextual cues in information.
- Consider your prior knowledge and experiences to help you make comparisons between familiar and new situations.
- Use all available information that could provide insights into a given situation.
- Evaluate information for credibility, quality, and relevance; look for any biases that may be present.



Think About It!

As a nurse leader, use inference to take what you know and what you have seen (e.g., patterns, patient outcomes, staff performance), apply your experience and a measure of common sense, and draw a reasonable conclusion from that information.

Activity: Using Critical Thinking to Address Staff Burnout

Directions

- With a partner or in small groups, read the scenario and answer the questions on the next page.
- Select a spokesperson to share your group's responses with the rest of the class.

USING CRITICAL THINKING TO ADDRESS STAFF BURNOUT

You are a nurse leader of a busy hospital unit. After reviewing the department quality dashboard, you recognize there is an increase in nurses calling in, a decrease in employee engagement, and a decrease in quality metrics.

It's a busy Tuesday afternoon. During nurse leader rounding, Sarah reveals to you that she recently made an error in medication administration. Sarah says, "I'm just exhausted, physically and emotionally." Luis, another nurse on the unit, walks up during the conversation and adds, "It's been nonstop for weeks."

Realizing the gravity of the situation, you discuss these concerns during the afternoon huddle. "I've noticed many of you are stretched thin. Let's talk openly about what's going on. It's important to me that we address this together."

The nurses slowly open up. "The workload has been relentless," says Sarah. "And it feels like our efforts go unnoticed," adds another nurse.

After the huddle, you reflect, piecing together the conversation. The team is clearly overworked, but there's more—a feeling of cynicism and lack of support that you believe is a sign of burnout.



Think About It!

Critical thinking for a nurse leader is different in some ways from critical thinking during bedside nursing. Staff nurses provide high quality patient care while following the Nursing Process, which cautions nurses about drawing conclusions in the absence of solid scientific evidence. However, in your nurse leader role, the situations you face are rarely scientific in nature. Leading a team, making patient assignments, troubleshooting because of malfunctioning equipment, and addressing high-stress patient/family interactions all require you to think through the facts and make judgment calls based upon various opinions and perspectives.

Activity: Using Critical Thinking to Address Staff Burnout (continued)

1. What **observations** led you to recognize the issue of burnout?

2. In the scenario, how did you effectively use **communication** during the huddle meeting?
What would you do to improve communications?

3. What **analysis** did you conduct after the meeting? What additional analysis could be done?

4. What did you **infer** and what subsequent actions would you take?
