

CONCEPT ANALYSIS OF EXPECTANCY

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Purpose: Expectancy theory hypothesizes that an individual's behavior can be influenced by another person's expectations. Researchers in psychology, education, business and neuroscience have studied expectancy since the early twentieth century. However, the concept of expectancy is relatively new to nursing. The purpose of this concept analysis is to provide an operational definition and conceptual model of expectancy that will be the starting point for research into understanding how nurses' assumptions and nonverbal communication affect patient behavior and outcomes.

Method: An extensive theoretical review of the literature was done using PubMed, CINAHL, Academic Search Premier, JSTOR and PsycINFO databases over a period of 40 years. The analysis is guided by Norris' method of concept clarification, which lends itself to the description of concepts relevant to nursing from the point of view of other disciplines. The five steps of Norris' approach are: 1) observing and describing the phenomenon repeatedly, including from the point of view of other disciplines where applicable; 2) systematizing the observations and descriptions; 3) developing an operational definition; 4) creating a conceptual model that includes all its components and attributes and; 5) formulating hypotheses.

Findings: One person's expectation for the behavior of another can come to serve as a self-fulfilling prophecy. Expectancy does not originate in the patient's belief system but in the caregiver. Conveying expectancy involves not only verbalization but also, and perhaps more importantly, covert communication, which has the ability to influence another person without words. Nonverbal cues play a significant role in conveying empathy as well as favorably influencing patient satisfaction in patient-healthcare provider relationships.

Discussion: Nurses believe that they play an active part in patient outcome and plan their goals and actions according to that assumption. Few, however, likely consider the subtle ways they convey their own personal expectations for a patient's outcome. Scientific research strongly suggests that interpersonal expectancy can have a profound impact on outcome. Nursing research using expectancy is limited, but this does not invalidate its applicability to nursing. It merely suggests the need for further investigation.