

Ep #141: Non-Clinical Skills Every Nurse Practitioner Needs



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Hosts

Anna Miller

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Welcome to the *Real Deal Nurse Practitioner Club*, the podcast for nurses who are ready to pass their boards and thrive in their careers as real deal nurse practitioners. I'm Anna and I'm the Director of Nursing Content at Blueprint Test Prep. Whether you're deep in exam prep or stepping into practice, I've got you. It is time to become the confident, knowledgeable NP that you're meant to be. Let's dive in.

Hello, hello there. Welcome back to the *Real Deal Nurse Practitioner Club* podcast. We've got an exciting topic today, especially for those of you that are getting ready to head out into your first jobs as real deal NPs. We are going to talk about the non-clinical essential skills that you need to succeed in practice. Right? In NP school, there's this obvious focus on being a safe clinician and being able to care for your patient's health. But what about all of those other things that make up clinical practice, like good communication, time management, and even conflict resolution?

And I have my friend Kaitlyn here again, and we are going to go over how to build up those non-clinical skills so that you can be the confident and successful NP that you were meant to be.

Kaitlyn: Hey everyone. I'm excited to be here and Anna's right. There are so many different skills that you need other than just good assessment and diagnosis skills in order to be a safe and successful NP. Hopefully, in your clinical rotations, you'll have the chance to practice these, but we've got some great tips for you today as well.

Anna: Yeah, and you can even start paying attention to these and start practicing these in those clinical rotations and make a really good first impression. Probably the most important skill, I would say, to complement your NP clinical knowledge is having good communication skills. And communication encompasses a lot of different areas of your practice. Not only is it talking to patients, but it's also relaying information to other clinicians and having clear and accurate documentation.

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Kaitlyn: Yeah, for sure. Good communication is such a huge part of being a nurse practitioner and a safe nurse practitioner.

Anna: Yes, absolutely. And just think about it, right? With patient communication, you need to be able to explain sometimes really complex information in a way that a patient will understand without overwhelming them. And you have to make sure you are asking questions that are going to gauge the patient's understanding and know how to show empathy as well.

Kaitlyn: Yeah, this is honestly really difficult. And good documentation and interprofessional communication, they kind of go hand in hand. So, of course, you want to have accurate documentation from a legal perspective, of course, but it also helps with the flow of information between providers. So, whether you are in primary care and making referrals to specialists or you work in a specialty and you're relaying information back to primary care, good communication fosters teamwork.

Anna: Yes, absolutely. I highly encourage you all through your clinical rotations to go look at some referrals and different visit notes, and you will see what we mean by good communication making all the difference. There are some notes from providers that are so easy to follow. You know exactly what they were seen for, what was done. And then there are others that are just this whole puzzle that you have to put together.

And while you'll be getting a lot of great experience during those clinical rotations, try to also observe what happens behind the scenes. So, ask about those follow-up reports, ask how referrals are made. Look into ways your preceptors make the most use out of the charting system. And along those same lines, sometimes it's difficult to really fine-tune those time management skills while in NP school, especially when you're doing all of the patient care stuff plus all of that behind-the-scenes stuff I just talked about. But what about what it's like during the work day when you are now this real deal NP and you have to handle a full patient schedule?

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Kaitlyn: That can be such a stressful feeling when you have a full schedule, following up on labs, reports, making calls, charting, and hopefully still being able to sit down for a lunch break. It's as much prioritization as it is time management. And during your clinical rotations, most of the burden of managing the schedule is on your preceptor. So, you don't really feel all the pressure of the other admin tasks that you'll need to learn to handle.

Anna: Yeah, my preceptors would often make all the phone calls, especially while I was going and seeing the patient on my own first. They'd catch up on their charting or their phone calls. Or if we started getting behind, they would go see a patient while I saw a patient. And so you're not getting that full picture of you solo managing a full patient load. And time management also just means being able to identify those urgent and those important tasks and address them accordingly. Like Kaitlyn said, it's all about that prioritization. And it's going to take a lot of practice to be able to find a flow that works for you and become smoother and quicker with those administrative tasks, but you will get there.

And I think that can segue nicely into learning how to be flexible. So that is another essential skill, right? Some days are going to be better than others in terms of patient load, patient concerns, paperwork, follow-up labs, and things like that. And part of the job is dealing with a little bit of uncertainty.

Kaitlyn: Yeah, and showing adaptability and flexibility in those day-to-day changes can definitely be a challenge, but don't forget that healthcare is constantly evolving. And new NPs need to stay up to date with new practices, technology, and even policies. So, you just have to make sure that you are doing your continuing education and also just being open-minded to adjust your approach as needed.

Anna: Yeah, absolutely. All right, let's switch things up a little bit and let's talk about some leadership type skills that you'll need to learn as a nurse practitioner. Now, you may or may not have had a leadership course in your program, but I have found that leadership and other skills like advocacy and even conflict resolution are really hard to learn in the classroom.

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Kaitlyn: Oh yeah, for sure. And I think there are so many different ways to be a leader. A big one is being a leader in practice. So, think of things like mentoring staff and having a positive influence on changes and policies in the practice. So, as a new NP, you may not be a leader at the top of the hierarchy when you first start, but you can still use your knowledge and experience to be a positive change agent.

Anna: Yeah, I love that. You absolutely can. And then another type of leadership I think is being a patient advocate. Right? As nurses, we're already pretty great at this, but as NPs, we have even more power to do good. Right, we act as a patient advocate in healthcare by ensuring that our patients' rights are upheld, their voices are heard, and their care needs are addressed.

Kaitlyn: Yeah, and you can also be an advocate for NP practice. I have found this opportunity so meaningful, and I love being able to advocate for the NP role and promote the value and impact of advanced nursing practice. I just love advocating for our NP learners.

Anna: Yeah, absolutely. That's a huge reason of why we do what we do. And, sometimes in leadership roles, there are conflicts that come up and we need to learn how to resolve them. And I'm not necessarily talking about conflicts with staff, although those can happen, but you'll need to learn how to have some difficult conversations with patients and learn how to stay calm under pressure.

Kaitlyn: Yeah, that's a great point. I can still remember all the really hard, heavy conversations I've had with patients for all kinds of different reasons. And I think as nurses, we are already good at talking with patients, but it's a whole other thing to have to deliver bad news. And I was fortunate to have some great preceptors who taught me a lot about that, but there's also a lot I just had to learn on my own through trial and error.

Anna: Yeah, a lot of it you get once you're on the job. And the other side of difficult conversations, like I mentioned, is really just staying calm. The

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ability to stay calm and composed under pressure is crucial in high-stress situations or just when dealing either with challenging patients or family members or just delivering bad news. And at the end of the day, you have to go back to those big ethical concepts that you might have blocked from your memory if you've already passed your boards—of justice, beneficence, non-maleficence, equity, and autonomy.

One of the hardest things I had to learn was that you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink. Our patients have the right to make their own decisions. So, as long as we are educating them and we are giving them all of their options, we are making sure they understand. They get to make the decision whether we necessarily agree with it or not

Kaitlyn: Yes, for sure. That is a great point, Anna. I don't really think that's something you necessarily see or learn to really cope with until you're just out there in clinical practice. And I thought it would be really good to end today's episode on a positive note. So, let's talk a little bit about self-care. So, we are big on self-care at the *Real Deal Nurse Practitioner Club*.

Anna: Yes, we are. I know we have a whole other podcast episode from a while ago on this very topic. But self-care is a huge, necessary part of being an effective healthcare provider. By taking care of ourselves, we better care for our patients. And self-care is not a one time thing. It's not like you go and you get a massage or whatever it is and then you're done. It is ongoing. We need to prioritize our physical, emotional, and psychological well-being. And as nurses and NPs, we are driven by our dedication to our patients. But we do need to remember that taking care of ourselves is taking care of your patients.

Kaitlyn: Yeah, for sure. We already talked about some good time management, which will also contribute to a healthy work life balance. But some other helpful strategies we recommend include mindfulness, relaxation techniques, regular activity and exercise. It's really important to get moving. And setting boundaries just to help protect your peace. So, seek counseling or mental health care if you ever feel like you need it. And

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remember, it's okay to say no when necessary. Overcommitting and taking on too much can absolutely lead to burnout. So, prioritize your workload and delegate tasks when possible.

Anna: Yes, setting boundaries. It's okay to say no. It's okay to seek help. Those are all huge things to remind yourself of. We can never do it all on our own. And prioritizing your self-care can really help you build resilience to cope with the emotional and the physical demands of the job. And that will hopefully allow for long-term career sustainability.

But that about wraps it up for today. And I really hope you enjoyed this episode. Thank you again for tuning in. Hopefully by practicing and strengthening these non-clinical skills, all of you as new real deal NPs can enhance your clinical capabilities. You'll feel more confident, you'll provide better care, and ensure success in your career. But I'll see you next time.

Thanks for listening to another episode of the *Real Deal Nurse Practitioner Club*. If you want more information about the different types of support that we offer to students and new nurse practitioners, you can visit npreviews.com. We'll see you next week.