



Observation of Practice Resources

Adapted from 2006 Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust in Dewing, J. (Ed.) (2007) RCN Workplace Resources for Practice Development. London: RCN.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are observations of practice?

- It literally means observing the activities that occur in an area where care takes place over a short period of time (usually around 15-30 minutes) and then feeding the observations back to the staff involved to identify learning and action points

What is the purpose of doing observations of practice?

- When we are familiar with an area we often take things for granted; observing practice:
 - Provides an opportunity to look differently at the ways we work – to celebrate what we are doing well and to identify what could be improved
 - Can help us to increase our understanding of the issues affecting the workplace culture

How many observations are undertaken?

- There is no 'correct' amount – you may want to undertake only 3 or 4 observations, or you may want to use observing practice as a learning opportunity and therefore involve as many staff as possible
- It is helpful if the observations take part at different times of the day to capture different staff and activities

Who does the observations?

- Two people undertake the observations; ideally they should be paired with someone who complements their skills and experience
- Staff do not need to be in any particular band, position or role in order to take part

What actually happens?

- Before staff undertake the activity, they should have an opportunity to talk through observing practice so that they understand the process and the principles of giving effective feedback
- A sheet containing a few questions to prompt observations can be used
- Prior to the activity, people (staff, patients and relatives) should be made aware that it is taking place and also when it has finished (see: http://higheredbcs.wiley.com/legacy/college/dewing/111867670X/supp/Chapter_5_web.pdf page W.5.3 for an example of a poster/leaflet to inform patients and staff)
- After the observations are complete, the staff should have the opportunity to discuss together what they have observed, and identify what and how they are going to feedback to the team

What are the benefits to staff?

- They will have an opportunity to step back and see what happens in their area and develop their observation skills
- They can have a direct impact on care by working with their colleagues to share good practices and identify ways to improve care
- They can develop their skills of giving and receiving feedback

What happens to the findings?

- Staff feedback to the individuals they have observed and identify good practices and any issues that need to be addressed or improved

Protocol for Observation of Practice

These resources can be amended/adapted to suit the practice area that you are working in. The following is offered as an example.

The purpose of doing observations of practice in Ward A is to work with the Ward Manager, Ward Sisters and Nursing Team to:

- **Extend our understanding of the nature of the environment and the culture we work in**
- **Identify how this impacts on patient care**
- **Share good practice, identify areas for improvement and action plan for the changes required**
- Observations will be carried out during July - August 2024; they will last 15 - 30 minutes and be at different locations within Ward A and at different times of the day
- Two people will undertake the observations; either the ward manager or one of the ward sisters and a member of the nursing team
- Feedback will be given to the nursing team shortly after the observations to identify areas for celebration and for action planning
- The ward managers and ward sisters will review all the observations to identify key themes for action and good practice for sharing

1. Preparation of Observers

- The ward manager and ward sisters will become familiar with the process of observing practice before they undertake observation of practice with a member of the nursing staff
- Before starting, the ward manager and/or the ward sisters will discuss the process of observing practice with the member of the nursing staff that they are observing with including:
 - Familiarising themselves with the paperwork
 - Responding to any concerns or questions
 - Discussing what to do in the event of an emergency situation or if you observe practice that causes you concern

2. Preparation of nursing staff and patients

- Agreed times for observations of practice will be publicised on Ward A using posters
- Verbal consent will be gained from all staff prior to undertaking observations; ideally this should be done by the nurse-in-charge at the beginning of the shift e.g. in handover
- The purpose of the activity is to observe practice and the environment, not individual patients and relatives; however, prior to the start of the activity, it is good practice to inform patients and relatives within close proximity of the area being observed about what you are doing and if this causes concern e.g. they do not wish to be included it may be necessary to renegotiate the area being observed

3. Undertaking the Observation

- On the day of planned observations, check all nursing staff have given verbal consent for the observation. Document who gained consent on documentation
- Ensure you have the correct paperwork – Observation Notes x2, Combined Observations for Feedback, guidelines for feedback
- Agree length of observation period (i.e. 15-30 minutes) and then agree which observer will be timekeeper
- Position yourselves in close proximity to each other – ensure you are not causing a health and safety risk



- Record observations for agreed time
- Ensure no individual staff member is identifiable in the notes
- Do not interact with each other or any staff
- Capture your observations as sights, sounds, smells and feelings

4. End of the Observation

- At the end of the observation period, observers to go somewhere private to discuss your key observations and ask clarifying questions of each other
- Agree the feedback you will give to the team and complete the Combined Observations for Feedback documentation with co-observer
- The feedback should be as sights, sounds, smells and feelings

5. Feedback to the Ward Team

- Feedback should be given immediately after the observation and to as many staff as possible in a quiet area, considering:
 - What will be fed back, where the feedback will take place, when and to who
 - Privacy
 - Allowing time for clarification
- If it is not possible to give feedback to all staff, agree alternatives e.g. to individuals or at handover time

6. Safe Storage of Documentation

- Attach the original Combined Observations for Feedback to all the Observation paperwork
- Ensure all original notes are deposited safely with ward manager/ward sister

7. Analysis and Action Planning

- When observations complete, ward manager and ward sisters to:
 - Review all Combined Observations for Feedback documentation
 - Identify how to involve the whole team in action planning and sharing good practices

REMEMBER ...

- All individuals, patients, relatives and staff members are unique
- Using a co-observer provides another viewpoint – increasing the opportunities for learning
- Preparation is vital
- The whole process is open and transparent
- Building in time to debrief, feedback and reflect at all stages is vital

Principles for Giving and Receiving Feedback

1. Get the facts right before giving feedback
2. Plan in advance for how you are going to give the feedback
3. Prepare feedback carefully and practice
4. Identify appropriate methods for giving feedback
5. Encourage staff to feel part of the process in advance so that it doesn't feel a 'them and us' situation
6. Work with the ward manager/ward sister so they can help giving feedback to the team
7. Give support before, during and after giving feedback
8. Give feedback on behaviour/issues not the person (i.e. soft on person, hard on the behaviours/issues)
9. Enable increased self awareness of behaviour and its consequences
10. Provide non-judgemental feedback which is truthful, direct and constructive
11. Focus on how the receiver of feedback can be in a position to move forward
12. Provide follow-up, where appropriate
13. Enable recipients to give feedback on how we gave feedback and how it could be more effective
14. Provide an opportunity to enable staff to action plan based on feedback and provide opportunities to identify how to share good practices

Observation Notes

Date of observation:

Time of observation:

Location of observation:

Name of person gaining consent for observation from staff:

Name of observer:

What do you see?

What do you hear?

What do you smell?

What do you feel?

Are there any surprises?

What stands out for you?

Combined Observations for Feedback

Date of observation:

Time of observation:

Location of observation:

Names of observers:

What did you see?

What did you hear?

What did you smell?

What did you feel?

How did you give feedback (where and when) and to who?