

# **Neurodiverse Patient Care Across Healthcare Settings: A Developmental and Neurodiversity Affirming Approach**

## **Course Description**

Healthcare professionals increasingly encounter neurodiverse individuals across a wide range of healthcare environments including emergency departments, inpatient units, outpatient clinics, pediatric settings, school health settings, and primary care practices. Neurodiverse patients may experience healthcare environments differently due to differences in sensory processing, communication, emotional regulation, stress response, attention, motor planning, and social interaction.

Traditional healthcare models often emphasize efficiency, compliance, and rapid task completion without fully considering how neurodevelopmental differences influence patient participation, cooperation, regulation, and care tolerance. As a result, neurodiverse patients may experience increased distress, escalation, communication breakdowns, procedural difficulty, sensory overload, and negative healthcare experiences.

This live continuing education course introduces nurses and nursing students to a developmental and relationship based framework for supporting neurodiverse patients across healthcare settings. Participants will explore how sensory processing, environmental stressors, communication differences, emotional regulation, and relational safety influence patient engagement and participation in care.

Practical strategies for improving patient interactions, reducing distress, increasing procedural tolerance, supporting communication, and fostering more neurodiversity affirming healthcare experiences will be discussed through clinical examples, interdisciplinary perspectives, and case based application.

This introductory course is designed to provide participants with foundational concepts and practical strategies that can be immediately integrated into nursing practice across emergency, inpatient, outpatient, pediatric, school health, and primary care settings.

Participants interested in continued professional development will also be introduced to opportunities for future advanced training and extended study in developmental and relationship based approaches for neurodiverse healthcare populations.

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## **Educational Need Statement**

Healthcare professionals increasingly provide care for neurodiverse individuals across a variety of healthcare settings, yet many nurses report limited formal training in developmental, sensory, communication, and relationship based approaches for supporting these patients.

Traditional healthcare environments may unintentionally contribute to patient dysregulation, escalation, communication breakdowns, procedural intolerance, and negative healthcare experiences due to sensory overload, unpredictability, rapid pacing, and limited understanding of neurodevelopmental differences.

This educational activity addresses the growing need for practical, neurodiversity affirming, and relationship based strategies that support patient engagement, communication, emotional regulation, participation in care, and overall quality of healthcare experiences.

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## **Professional Practice Gap**

Many healthcare professionals receive limited training in understanding how sensory processing, emotional regulation, communication differences, developmental functioning, and environmental stressors impact neurodiverse patients within healthcare settings.

As a result, patient behaviors may be misinterpreted as noncompliance, defiance, or behavioral difficulty rather than expressions of stress, overload, communication challenges, fear, or dysregulation. This gap may contribute to increased patient distress, escalation, procedural difficulty, caregiver stress, and reduced quality of care experiences.

Developmental and relationship based approaches provide healthcare professionals with frameworks for improving communication, supporting regulation, increasing patient cooperation, and promoting more effective and compassionate healthcare interactions.

## **Course Schedule**

**9:00 AM to 9:30 AM**

### **Understanding Neurodiversity Within Healthcare Contexts**

Topics Include:

- Neurodiversity affirming care
- Autism spectrum disorder
- ADHD and attention regulation
- Sensory processing differences
- Emotional regulation and stress response
- Communication differences
- Anxiety within healthcare environments
- Masking, shutdown, and escalation
- Reframing “noncompliance” and “challenging behavior”

Clinical Focus:

Understanding how neurodevelopmental and sensory differences influence patient presentation, participation, communication, and cooperation within healthcare settings.

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**9:30 AM to 10:05 AM**

## **Developmental and Relationship Based Approaches in Nursing Care**

Topics Include:

- Relationship based healthcare practices
- Co-regulation and relational safety
- Emotional attunement
- Patient pacing and processing time
- Supporting predictability and trust
- Respecting autonomy and participation
- Developmental approaches to patient support

Clinical Focus:

Using developmental and relationship based approaches to improve patient regulation, engagement, cooperation, and care tolerance.

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**10:05 AM to 10:15 AM**

**Break**

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**10:15 AM to 10:50 AM**

## **Sensory Processing and Healthcare Environments**

Topics Include:

- Sensory overload in healthcare settings
- Environmental stressors:
  - lighting
  - alarms
  - noise
  - touch
  - smells

- transitions
- Escalation versus dysregulation
- Sensory informed nursing strategies
- Supporting environmental predictability

Clinical Focus:

Recognizing how sensory and environmental factors impact patient regulation, procedural success, and participation in care.

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**10:50 AM to 11:25 AM**

## **Communication and Interaction Strategies for Neurodiverse Patients**

Topics Include:

- Reducing verbal overload
- Slowing interaction pacing
- Processing time
- Predictable sequencing
- Supporting minimally verbal patients
- Caregiver collaboration
- Respectful and affirming communication strategies
- Avoiding escalation and power struggles

Clinical Focus:

Supporting communication, reducing patient distress, and improving cooperation during healthcare interactions and procedures.

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**11:25 AM to 12:00 PM**

## **Clinical Application Across Healthcare Settings**

Topics Include:

- Emergency department scenarios
- Pediatric healthcare settings
- Primary care environments
- Inpatient settings
- School nursing contexts
- Medical examinations and procedures
- Clinical case studies and discussion

Clinical Focus:

Applying developmental and relationship based approaches across healthcare environments to improve patient experiences and support more effective care delivery.

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## **Teaching Methods**

- Live lecture presentation
  - Interactive group discussion
  - Clinical case analysis
  - Scenario based learning
  - Reflective learning activities
  - Audience participation
  - Question and answer discussion
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## **Future Continuing Education Opportunities**

This course is designed as an introductory continuing education experience and foundational framework for developmental and relationship based approaches within healthcare settings.

Participants interested in continued professional development may pursue future advanced trainings focused on:

- neurodiversity affirming healthcare practices
- sensory informed care
- developmental relationship based intervention strategies
- interdisciplinary collaboration
- advanced clinical application across healthcare environments
- pediatric and behavioral healthcare settings
- hospital based implementation and staff development initiatives