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CASE REPORT

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Margaret Thompson: Pre-Operative Anxiety - 58yo Female - Pre-Surgical - Anxiety

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ABSTRACT

The case involves a simulation designed for advanced beginner nursing students to enhance their skills in empathetic communication and patient care. The primary learning objectives are to develop the ability to communicate empathetically with anxious patients, understand and address their concerns about surgery, explore techniques for pre-operative reassurance and education, and identify potential anxiety triggers related to medical procedures. The clinical scenario features Margaret Thompson, a 58-year-old female experiencing significant anxiety prior to her scheduled laparoscopic cholecystectomy. Students are tasked with interacting with Margaret to practice empathy and communication, addressing her fears about the surgery, potential complications, and its impact on her work and family responsibilities. The simulation allows learners to engage in a patient-centered approach, using tools such as blood pressure cuffs and stethoscopes, to reassure Margaret and provide necessary information. This case is useful in a curriculum for developing foundational communication skills and understanding the emotional and psychological needs of patients in a clinical setting.

Keywords pre-operative anxiety; communication; empathy; surgery

CASE OVERVIEW

Interact with Margaret "Maggie" Thompson, a 58-year-old experiencing anxiety before a laparoscopic cholecystectomy. Practice empathy and communication to address her concerns.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Develop skills in empathetic communication with anxious patients.
2. Understand and address patient concerns about surgery.
3. Explore techniques to reassure and educate patients pre-operatively.
4. Identify and discuss potential anxiety triggers related to medical procedures.

CLINICAL PRESENTATION

Name	Margaret Thompson
Age	58
Sex	Female
Race / ethnicity	White Non-Hispanic
Height	5ft 4in
Weight	140 lbs

Chief complaint. I'm really anxious about my upcoming surgery today

History of present illness. Margaret has been scheduled for a laparoscopic cholecystectomy today. She reports increasing anxiety and trouble sleeping over the past few days, driven by fears about the surgery and potential complications. Her anxiety is compounded by concerns about missing work and family responsibilities.

Past medical history. - Hypertension
- Hyperlipidemia

Past surgical history. None. She has never had surgery or anything more than local anesthesia

Past psychiatric history. None reported

Social history. Non-smoker, occasional glass of wine on weekends, no recreational drug use. Works as an elementary school teacher. Lives with spouse and has two adult children.

Family history. Mother had similar gallbladder issues. No major psychiatric history.

Medications. - Lisinopril 10mg PO daily
- Atorvastatin 20mg PO daily

Allergies. NKDA

SIMULATED CHARACTER

Name. Margaret Thompson

Demographics. 58-year-old White female

Personality and mood. Anxious but generally optimistic, communicates openly, tends to ask many questions to alleviate concerns.

Identity, purpose and background. Margaret is a dedicated teacher and mother who is deeply concerned about her health and the impact of her surgery on her family and work. She is worried about the surgery and potential complications but is eager to be reassured.

Simulation behaviour. Only reveal specific health concerns if asked directly. Express anxiety and seek reassurance but be receptive to empathetic communication.

Opening line

> Hello, I'm Margaret. I'm just really nervous about this upcoming surgery.

Procedures and actions available to the learner

Action	Result added to the chart	How the character responds
Blood Pressure Cuff	BP: 130/85 mmHg (normally well-controlled on current medications, elevated due to pre-op anxiety)	Is my blood pressure okay? I hope it's not too high because of my nerves.
Stethoscope	Regular rate and rhythm, no murmurs, clicks, or rubs.	Does my heart sound normal? I'm always worried about that.
Pulse Oximeter	Oxygen saturation at 98% on room air.	Is my oxygen level alright?
Electrocardiogram (ECG)	Normal sinus rhythm, 92 bpm, no acute changes.	What do the lines mean? Is everything okay with my heart?

DEBRIEFING DIMENSIONS

Create rapport quickly (max 2)

*Award 0 points if not observed

*Award 1 point for: Introduces self appropriately; uses patient's preferred name; demonstrates professional presence and courtesy; establishes basic rapport in structured scenarios; may need prompting for warmth or connection (Domain 2.1a: Demonstrate qualities of empathy; Domain 9.1c: Demonstrate professional identity formation;Domain 10.1a: Demonstrate a commitment to personal health and well-being)

*Award 2 points for: Consistently creates rapport quickly across diverse situations; adapts approach to patient emotional state and context; demonstrates genuine warmth and connection; establishes trust efficiently even in challenging (Domain 2.1a: Demonstrate qualities of empathy (advanced);Domain 2.2a: Communicate effectively with individuals and families;Domain 9.1c: Demonstrate professional identity formation (advanced); Domain 10.1a: Demonstrate commitment to personal health and well-being (advanced))

Elicit all concerns (max 2)

*Award 0 points if not observed

*Award 1 point for: Asks open-ended question to elicit concerns; attempts to gather complete list; uses "What else?" or similar; may miss some concerns without prompting; demonstrates beginning skill in organizing patient agenda (Domain 2.2a: Communicate effectively with individuals and families; Domain 2.5a: Demonstrate the ability to build partnerships with individuals and families;Domain 5.1a: Apply quality improvement principles in care delivery)

*Award 2 points for: Consistently elicits comprehensive list of concerns; uses effective probing ("What else?" "Anything more?"); ensures all concerns are voiced; organizes concerns clearly; adapts approach to patient communication style (Domain 2.2a: Communicate effectively with individuals and families (advanced);Domain 2.5a: Demonstrate ability to build partnerships (advanced);Domain 5.1a: Apply quality improvement principles (advanced);Domain 5.2a: Contribute to a culture of patient safety)

Negotiate the agenda (max 2)

*Award 0 points if not observed

*Award 1 point for: Acknowledges patient's concerns; identifies priorities; attempts to establish shared agenda; may struggle with time management, competing priorities, or conflict; negotiation may feel one-sided at times (Domain 2.5a: Demonstrate the ability to build partnerships with individuals and families; Domain 2.6a: Demonstrate accountability to

individuals and families;Domain 9.3a: Demonstrate accountability for care delivery)
*Award 2 points for: Skillfully negotiates agenda balancing patient priorities and clinical needs; manages competing concerns effectively; addresses disagreements; establishes clear, mutually agreed-upon plan; demonstrates flexibility and partnership (Domain 2.5a: Demonstrate ability to build partnerships (advanced); Domain 2.6a: Demonstrate accountability to individuals and families (advanced); Domain 6.3a: Communicate with other members of the healthcare team; Domain 9.3a: Demonstrate accountability for care delivery (advanced))

Open the conversation (max 2)
*Award 0 points if not observed
*Award 1 point for: Uses open-ended questions to begin; allows patient to speak without early interruption; demonstrates beginning patient-centered approach; may need prompting to maintain openness (Domain 2.2a: Communicate effectively with individuals and families; Domain 1.1a: Demonstrate an understanding of the discipline of nursing's distinct perspective; Domain 2.1a: Demonstrate qualities of empathy)
*Award 2 points for: Consistently opens conversation with effective open-ended questions; allows patient to tell story without interruption; demonstrates strong patient-centered approach; creates space for patient narrative (Domain 2.2a: Communicate effectively with individuals and families (advanced);Domain 1.1a: Demonstrate understanding of nursing's distinct perspective (advanced);Domain 2.1a: Demonstrate qualities of empathy (advanced);Domain 2.4a: Integrate evidence-based practice into care delivery)

Explore Perspective (max 2)
*Award 0 points if not observed
*Award 1 point for: Asks about patient's understanding, beliefs, or concerns; attempts to elicit patient perspective; gathers essential information; may miss opportunities to explore deeper meaning or subtle cues (Domain 2.2a: Communicate effectively with individuals and families
Domain 2.1a: Demonstrate qualities of empathy
Domain 1.2a: Apply theory and evidence-based knowledge from nursing and other disciplines)
*Award 2 points for: Skillfully explores patient perspective; asks clarifying questions; demonstrates genuine curiosity; elicits deeper understanding of patient's experience, beliefs, and values; recognizes and follows subtle cues (Domain 2.2a: Communicate effectively with individuals and families (advanced)
Domain 2.1a: Demonstrate qualities of empathy (advanced)
Domain 1.2a: Apply theory and evidence-based knowledge (advanced)
Domain 2.9a: Provide care that reflects an understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion)

Name emotions (max 2)
*Award 0 points if not observed
*Award 1 point for: Identifies obvious emotions (sadness, anger, fear); names emotions with moderate accuracy; may miss subtle or complex emotions; demonstrates awareness of emotional content (Domain 2.1a: Demonstrate qualities of empathy
Domain 1.1a: Demonstrate understanding of nursing's distinct perspective
Domain 9.1c: Demonstrate professional identity formation)
*Award 2 points for: Accurately identifies and names emotions including subtle and complex feelings; uses emotion words appropriately and sensitively; validates patient's emotional experience; demonstrates sophisticated emotional awareness (Domain 2.1a: Demonstrate qualities of empathy (advanced)
Domain 1.1a: Demonstrate understanding of nursing's distinct perspective (advanced)
Domain 2.2a: Communicate effectively with individuals and families (advanced)
Domain 9.1c: Demonstrate professional identity formation (advanced))

Respond with empathy (PEARLS) (max 2)
*Award 0 points if not observed
*Award 1 point for: Uses 2-3 PEARLS components with some prompting; demonstrates empathy in straightforward situations; responses may feel somewhat formulaic; shows genuine care but may lack depth (Domain 2.1a: Demonstrate qualities of empathy
Domain 2.2a: Communicate effectively with individuals and families
Domain 9.1c: Demonstrate professional identity formation
Domain 9.2a: Demonstrate accountability for nursing practice)
*Award 2 points for: Consistently uses multiple PEARLS components spontaneously (Partnership, Empathy,

Apology/Acknowledgment, Respect, Legitimation, Support); empathic responses feel genuine and individualized; adapts PEARLS to patient needs; demonstrates deep compassion (Domain 2.1a: Demonstrate qualities of empathy (advanced)
Domain 2.2a: Communicate effectively with individuals and families (advanced)
Domain 2.5a: Demonstrate ability to build partnerships (advanced)
Domain 9.1c: Demonstrate professional identity formation (advanced)
Domain 9.2a: Demonstrate accountability for nursing practice (advanced))

Transition to clinician-directed encounter (max 2)

*Award 0 points if not observed

*Award 1 point for: Signals transition appropriately; maintains rapport during shift; balances patient-centered and clinician-directed approaches; transition may feel abrupt at times; may need prompting (Domain 2.2a: Communicate effectively with individuals and families
Domain 5.1a: Apply quality improvement principles in care delivery
Domain 9.3a: Demonstrate accountability for care delivery)

*Award 2 points for: Smoothly transitions between patient-centered and clinician-directed portions; maintains rapport throughout; balances approaches skillfully; transition feels natural; explains rationale when appropriate (Domain 2.2a: Communicate effectively with individuals and families (advanced)
Domain 5.1a: Apply quality improvement principles (advanced)
Domain 5.2a: Contribute to a culture of patient safety
Domain 9.3a: Demonstrate accountability for care delivery (advanced))

Share information: Orient patient (max 2)

*Award 0 points if not observed

*Award 1 point for: Orients patient to information-sharing portion of encounter; signals transition; may need prompting for clarity (Domain 2.2a: Communicate effectively with individuals and families
Domain 2.6a: Demonstrate accountability to individuals and families
Domain 5.1a: Apply quality improvement principles)

*Award 2 points for: Clearly orients patient to information-sharing; signals transition smoothly; prepares patient for what's coming; creates receptive environment (Domain 2.2a: Communicate effectively with individuals and families (advanced)
Domain 2.6a: Demonstrate accountability to individuals and families (advanced)
Domain 5.2a: Contribute to a culture of patient safety)

Share information: Incorporate perspective (max 2)

*Award 0 points if not observed

*Award 1 point if: Attempts to incorporate patient perspective into information-sharing; asks about patient understanding; may miss opportunities to fully integrate patient's view (Domain 2.2a: Communicate effectively with individuals and families
Domain 2.5a: Demonstrate ability to build partnerships
Domain 1.2a: Apply theory and evidence-based knowledge)

*Award 2 points if: Consistently incorporates patient perspective throughout information-sharing; builds on patient's understanding; adapts information to patient's frame of reference; demonstrates true partnership (Domain 2.2a: Communicate effectively with individuals and families (advanced)
Domain 2.5a: Demonstrate ability to build partnerships (advanced)
Domain 2.4a: Integrate evidence-based practice into care delivery
Domain 1.2a: Apply theory and evidence-based knowledge (advanced))

Share information: Use plain language (max 2)

*Award 0 points if not observed

*Award 1 points if: Uses plain language most of the time; avoids some jargon; may occasionally use medical terms without explanation; adapts to health literacy level with prompting (Domain 2.2a: Communicate effectively with individuals and families
Domain 2.9a: Provide care that reflects understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion
Domain 5.1a: Apply quality improvement principles)

*Award 2 points if: Consistently uses plain language appropriate to patient's health literacy level; avoids jargon or explains terms clearly; checks for understanding; adapts language based on patient cues (Domain 2.2a: Communicate effectively with individuals and families (advanced)
Domain 2.9a: Provide care that reflects understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion (advanced)
Domain 5.2a: Contribute to a culture of patient safety
Domain 5.1a:

Apply quality improvement principles (advanced))

Share information: ART Loops (max 2)

*Award 0 points if not observed

*Award 1 points if: Uses ART framework (Ask > Respond > Tell) with some prompting; demonstrates beginning skill in interactive information-sharing; may default to one-way information delivery at times (Domain 2.2a: Communicate effectively with individuals and families
Domain 2.5a: Demonstrate ability to build partnerships
Domain 5.1a: Apply quality improvement principles)

*Award 2 points for: Skillfully employs ART Loops throughout information-sharing; consistently asks, responds to patient input, then tells; creates interactive dialogue; adapts based on patient responses (Domain 2.2a: Communicate effectively with individuals and families (advanced)
Domain 2.5a: Demonstrate ability to build partnerships (advanced)
Domain 5.2a: Contribute to a culture of patient safety
Domain 2.4a: Integrate evidence-based practice into care delivery)

Assess understanding: Teach-back using ART (max 2)

*Award 0 points if not observed

*Award 1 points if: Asks patient to teach back information; uses ART framework; assesses understanding; may miss gaps in understanding or need prompting to clarify; teach-back may feel mechanical

*Award 2 points if: Consistently and skillfully uses teach-back with ART framework; assesses understanding thoroughly; identifies and addresses gaps; adapts explanation based on teach-back responses; ensures comprehension; teach-back feels natural (Domain 2.2a: Communicate effectively with individuals and families (advanced)
Domain 5.2a: Contribute to a culture of patient safety (advanced)
Domain 5.1a: Apply quality improvement principles (advanced)
Domain 2.6a: Demonstrate accountability to individuals and families (advanced)
Domain 2.4a: Integrate evidence-based practice into care delivery)

Close the visit: Clarify next steps (max 2)

*Award 0 points if not observed

*Award 1 point for: Clarifies next steps; provides basic information about follow-up; may miss some details or need prompting for completeness (Domain 2.2a: Communicate effectively with individuals and families
Domain 2.6a: Demonstrate accountability to individuals and families
Domain 5.2a: Contribute to a culture of patient safety
Domain 9.3a: Demonstrate accountability for care delivery)

*Award 2 points for: Clearly and thoroughly clarifies next steps; ensures patient understands what to do, when, and why; addresses logistics; confirms patient ability to follow through (Domain 2.2a: Communicate effectively with individuals and families (advanced)
Domain 2.6a: Demonstrate accountability to individuals and families (advanced)
Domain 5.2a: Contribute to a culture of patient safety (advanced)
Domain 9.3a: Demonstrate accountability for care delivery (advanced)
Domain 6.3a: Communicate with other members of the healthcare team)

Close the visit: Elicit final questions (max 2)

*Award 0 points if not observed

*Award 1 point for: Asks if patient has questions; allows time for response; may need prompting to probe further or ensure all questions addressed (Domain 2.2a: Communicate effectively with individuals and families
Domain 2.5a: Demonstrate ability to build partnerships
Domain 2.6a: Demonstrate accountability to individuals and families)

*Award 2 points for: Actively elicits final questions using open invitation; creates space for patient to ask; probes to ensure all questions addressed; responds thoroughly to all concerns (Domain 2.2a: Communicate effectively with individuals and families (advanced)
Domain 2.5a: Demonstrate ability to build partnerships (advanced)
Domain 2.6a: Demonstrate accountability to individuals and families (advanced)
Domain 5.2a: Contribute to a culture of patient safety)

Close the visit: Acknowledge and support (max 2)

*Award 0 points if not observed

*Award 1 point for: Acknowledges patient and provides basic support; closure may feel rushed or incomplete at times;

demonstrates care (Domain 2.1a: Demonstrate qualities of empathy
Domain 2.2a: Communicate effectively with individuals and families
Domain 9.1c: Demonstrate professional identity formation)
*Award 2 points for: Meaningfully acknowledges patient; provides appropriate support and encouragement; closure feels complete and supportive; leaves patient feeling cared for and prepared (Domain 2.1a: Demonstrate qualities of empathy (advanced)
Domain 2.2a: Communicate effectively with individuals and families (advanced)
Domain 2.5a: Demonstrate ability to build partnerships (advanced)
Domain 9.1c: Demonstrate professional identity formation (advanced))

COMPETENCY ALIGNMENT: AACN ESSENTIALS 2021

Progression level. 1 - Entry

This simulation case focuses on developing foundational skills in empathetic communication and patient-centered care, which are essential for entry-level nursing practice.

Domain 2: Person-Centered Care

Code	Competency	Rationale
2.1	Engage with the individual in establishing a caring relationship.	The case emphasizes the importance of building rapport and establishing a caring relationship with the patient, which is central to addressing pre-operative anxiety.
2.2	Communicate effectively with individuals.	Effective communication is a key component of the case, as the nurse must address the patient's concerns and provide reassurance.
2.5	Develop a plan of care.	The nurse must work with the patient to address her concerns and develop a plan to manage her anxiety pre-operatively.

Domain 5: Quality and Safety

Code	Competency	Rationale
5.2	Contribute to a culture of patient safety.	Addressing the patient's anxiety effectively contributes to a safer surgical experience by reducing stress-related complications.

Domain 9: Professionalism

Code	Competency	Rationale
9.1	Demonstrate an ethical comportment in one's practice reflective of nursing's mission to society.	The case involves demonstrating empathy and professionalism in addressing the patient's emotional needs.

Domain 10: Personal, Professional, and Leadership Development

Code	Competency	Rationale
10.1	Demonstrate a commitment to personal health and well-being.	The case encourages the nurse to support the patient's well-being by addressing her anxiety and promoting a positive surgical outcome.

SIMULATION FORMAT

Platform	Figment Clinic
Format	Clinical encounter simulation with a full patient record
Synthesised voice	shimmer
Case first authored	August 2026

The interactive version of this case runs on the Figment Clinic platform. This article is the archival record of its content at the time of publication.

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