

THE ART OF NURSING: PERCEPTION AND THE CARING EXPERIENCE Nursing has also been defined by the description of its clinical functions, such as maintaining or restoring normal life function, observing and reporting signs of change in a patient's condition, and assessing the patient's physical, social, and emotional state. Based on these assessments, nursing also involves formulating and performing a plan of care, counseling in relation to other health-related services and resources, and teaching to address knowledge deficits.¹⁰ In each of these endeavors, individual patient perception is critical. A patient's perception of caring behaviors rendered is influenced by an interactive combination of situational, attitudinal, and behavioral biasing factors. A patient's beliefs, values, and social or cultural acceptances/approvals affect his or her attitude toward caring behaviors rendered.¹² If a patient does not approve of touching because of cultural beliefs, norms, or biases, he or she may reject such nonverbal caring behaviors. The situation or status of the patient may be based on his or her perception of health and will also dictate the patient's perception of his or her need.¹¹ If the patient is in a situation in which he or she is diapered and soiled, verbal caring behaviors may not be perceived as caring, as he or she needs nonverbal caring behaviors, such as cleaning and/or bathing. Perception is also influenced by personalities, attitudes, biases, and previous experiences. Cooper¹¹ states that perception is a critical component that precedes one's behavior and influences one's definition of certain concepts such as caring. As nurses strive to influence the caring experience of patients, individual patient perception must be understood and considered in the preparation of individualized care plans. The results of the evaluation determine the individual's perception, which in turn influences the individual's behavioral response. Perception is the mechanism by which an individual evaluates information received from the external environment.