Task 2: Clinical Interview Reflection

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After watching my interview with Mrs. XXXX, I was able to reflect on both my areas of strength and weaknesses with regard to the interview process. Doing so helped me develop an awareness of my techniques and determine strategies that will help improve my interviewing skills in the future.

The Interview

Identification of Personal Strengths

Professional conduct. Throughout my interview with Zak’s mother, I was able to maintain professionalism. I used appropriate language related to the assessment process and, in my opinion, I made the interviewee feel comfortable answering my questions and engaging in discussion about her son. There were several times throughout the interview in which some of Mrs. XXXX’s answers to my questions turned into lengthy stories about her son; I was patient and listened to these stories, even if I felt at the time that they may have been off-topic or that they may have been segueing into a topic that I planned on covering later in the interview.

Introduction. At the beginning of the interview, I welcomed Mrs. XXXX and tried to develop rapport by commenting on her Halloween glasses and asking about her plans for Halloween. I thanked her for taking the time to take part in the interview and I explained how the interview relates to the overall assessment process. I feel that the explanation I gave was sufficient, but in the future I hope that I will be able to conduct this part of the interview without having to look at my notes. The checklist for informed consent provided on Blackboard was very helpful, and this helped guide me through this process. Overall, I think that I provided the interviewee with a solid description of the both the purpose of the interview and the important issues of informed consent and confidentiality.
Nonverbal Strategies. I think that my use of nonverbal strategies throughout the interview with Mrs. XXXX was one of my greatest strengths. In particular, nodding my head and leaning into my interviewee demonstrated that I truly was listening to what she had to say. I found that I used these two strategies quite naturally and in fact didn’t realize the extent to which I used them until I actually watched my interview later on. I also feel that I balanced my eye contact with Mrs. XXXX and my note-taking fairly well; I don’t feel that there was ever a time in which my interviewee felt that I was spending more time trying to record what she was saying than paying attention to her. Finally, I smiled and laughed at the appropriate times, which I believe helped my interviewee feel more at ease.

Organization. Realizing just how verbose Mrs. XXXX could be at times made me quite nervous during the interview. Although I tried to redirect her several times, there were definitely times in which I thought that I would go over the time limit. The fact that I completed the interview within the appropriate amount of time made me realize how important it is to organize the topics I wish to cover and the questions I plan on asking ahead of time. Doing so helped me stay on track and acquire the information that I needed. At the end of each topic I covered, I transitioned into the next topic by letting Mrs. XXXX know what I would be asking her about next. I feel that this was a strength of mine because it provided direction for both me and my interviewee.

Areas for Growth

Questioning. I definitely feel that questioning is an area that I need to work on. Although many of my questions were open-ended questions that allowed Mrs. XXXX to provide important information about her son, many of my questions were also “yes/no” questions (for example, “Is this the first time he has expressed worry over death?”). As I have already mentioned, Mrs.
XXXX was a very verbal interviewee; as a result, I found that she was willing to provide information regardless of the type of question I asked. I realize, however, that not all interviewees are like this and that in asking “yes/no” questions, I run the risk of interfering with the flow of the interview process or – worse yet – making the interviewee feel like I am interrogating him or her (Sattler & Hoge, 2006).

I also found that several of the questions I asked Mrs. XXXX were redundant; the answers that she provided for these questions had already been provided in either a story she had told about Zak or in an answer that she had given for another question. Asking questions that are related to the topic of discussion but that are not repetitive in nature will take practice, and I will definitely be more cognizant of this aspect of the interview process in the future.

**Querying specific areas.** I knew that the referral question had to do with anxiety; I therefore should have prepared more anxiety-related questions. Separation anxiety is one area in particular that I think I should have queried. Hearing Mrs. XXXX’s story about Zak getting upset when she had asked him to stay in her classroom after school until she was finished with her meeting raised a red flag for me the second time around. I should have asked Mrs. XXXX about how Zak reacts when, for example, she might run late in picking him up from a friend’s house or from school. In addition, when Mrs. XXXX mentioned that Zak began biting his nails when he first started school, I should have asked her if Zak experiences other physical signs of anxiety (stomach aches, racing heart, etc.).

**Identification of More Appropriate Ways to Address Challenges**

**Talkative interviewee.** The main challenge that I faced in this interview was having a very talkative interviewee. I think that the best way to address this particular challenge in the future is to be direct with the interviewee: I must let him or her know that I have an agenda to follow with regard to interview questions and that it is important that I stay on track. I was
hesitant to try this strategy because Mrs. XXXX is a colleague of mine whom is normally quite shy; I believe that she was trying to help me out by providing as much information as possible during the interview. Having a plan in place with regard to questions and redirecting the interviewee when necessary are also appropriate ways to address this particular challenge.

**Strategies for Personal Improvement in Clinical Interviewing**

*Gain familiarity with specific areas to assess.* Above all, I think that it is especially important for me to gain familiarity with the social, emotional, and behavioral disorders that are often linked to referral questions (for example, ADHD, anxiety, depression, etc.). Reviewing the DSM-IV criteria for specific disorders will increase my awareness of the unique symptoms and behaviors associated with them; it will also help guide me in asking appropriate questions and will hopefully enhance my ability to detect “red flags” – or areas of concern - during the actual interview.

*Allow the interviewee’s answers to questions help guide the interview.* Although it is important to have a plan with regard to the questions that will be asked during the interview, oftentimes the interviewee’s responses will help the interviewer decide which areas he or she should query. Allowing the interviewee’s answers help guide the interview is a technique that involves active listening, something that I found difficult at times due to the fact that the interview process involves a great deal of multi-tasking: the interviewer, after all, must develop rapport, record notes, maintain direction, and keep track of time. Becoming proficient at this particular interviewing technique will definitely take practice. In addition, I will need to become confident with my own decision-making skills and develop a “mental” database of questions that I can automatically choose from when the interviewee gives a particular response during the interview.
References