3.11: Assertive Communication

The skill of assertiveness is important to nurses. Nurses are expected to be the patients’ advocates. So, they need to have the assertive communication skills in order to be able to be patients’ advocates. Assertiveness enables a person to be honest with him/herself and in relationships with others. Assertiveness helps to enhance relationships, avoid power games and is a vehicle for clear outcomes. Hargis as cited by van Niekerk identifies four elements of assertive communication:

• **Content** – where the rights of the people involved are embedded gently in the statement. This could be done by using an explanation, empathy for the listener, and praise for the listener, an apology for the consequence for the listener or a compromise that is favorable to both people.

• **Covert elements** – where the speaker is able to recognize their rights and the rights of the listener in the communication process. These include respect, expressing feelings, having your own priorities, being able to say ‘no’, being able to make mistakes and choosing to say nothing.

• **Process** – concerned with how people express themselves assertively. Is their body language, intonation and choice of language reflective of a confident assertive person? Are the processes that make up communication congruent, in keeping with what is being said? The process also involves managing the setting so that people are not embarrassed, or the noise levels are kept to a minimum. Increasing the likelihood of assertive communication happening again involves feedback to the listener to show that their accomplishment is appreciated.

• **Non-verbal cues** – gesture, touch, proxemics and posture – also need to reflect confidence, regard and respect for self and others.