3.12: Therapeutic Interactions

Therapeutic interactions are purposeful as opposed to social. Social interaction entertains the participants, but in a professional situation, the nurse usually has a clinical objective that he/she wants to achieve with communication. The nurses therefore, decides on the purpose of the interaction before or shortly after it begins. The following purposes are common in nursing:

- **Assess a patient**: The nurse wants to know more about a patient to identify his/her problems. This type of conversation can be a structured interview using an interview schedule. The purpose of this conversation is always a better understanding of the patient.

- **Instruct a patient**: Patient instruction may vary from an informal conversation during which few facts are conveyed to an elaborate instruction session.

- **Problem solving**: If a patient discuss his/her problems with a nurse, the nurse helps the patient to analyze the problem, consider possible alternative ways of handling it and how to decide which way is the best. Problem solving is done with the patients and not for them.

- **Give emotional support**: The presence of an empathetic nurse, that is, one who can enter into the patient’s shoes and understand the patient’s experience, is immensely supportive of the patient. Emotional support alleviates the loneliness of the patient’s experience of illness and increases his/her dignity [17].