

Nurse Becoming Ep.094: Time Management Tips For NPs

Tue, Mar 08, 2022 9:35AM 15:44

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

charting, blocking, activities, efficient, timer, minutes, day, pomodoro method, task, charts, clinic, note, working, inefficiency, method, notifications, productivity, negotiated, week, called

SPEAKERS

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Hello, hello, welcome back to the Nurse Becoming Podcast. It's your host, Amanda Guarniere. As always, I'm so grateful to have you listening today. And before we get started, I wanted to read this really, really nice note that I got over on my "Buy Me A Coffee" page, if you haven't heard, I have a way that you can buy me a coffee and support the content that I create here on the podcast. And that's at [buymeacoffee.com/nurse becoming](https://buymeacoffee.com/nursebecoming). And someone recently bought me a coffee and left this note that I wanted to share. And it says, "Thank you so much for all you do. I purchase your resume template and use it for my resume cover letters and thank you letters. I re-listened to the podcast episodes before creating a portfolio, interviewing and negotiating. I scoured your blog as well for pre written scripts. This week, I signed my offer letter for my dream job successfully negotiated an extra \$10,000 per year, and I'm working four days a week without call and weekends! I could not have done it without you! Thank you." That is just the nicest note to see in my inbox. And it came in this morning on my recording day. So I wanted to share that with you. And again, if you want to support this content creation, support the show, you can go to buymeacoffee.com/nursebecoming - that link will also be in the show notes. If you feel inspired to send me a coffee and also a note of gratitude or success or whatever- I love, I love hearing from you. So today, let's get started and dive into a discussion that I want to have kind of a deeper dive into productivity and charting and time management. And back in episode 75, if you scroll back through the episodes, I interviewed Dr. Sarah Smith, about getting your charts done on time. And Dr. Smith is a physician and a charting coach, and she provided a great framework for getting started with being more efficient with your charting. So this is definitely for providers. I don't think that as nurses, you have as much of a struggle with this. But charting for providers is a big big time suck. So definitely go ahead and if you haven't already, take a listen to that episode 75. It's called, "Getting Your Charts Done On Time with Dr. Sarah Smith". And the framework that she laid out to get started is is a three part a three step process, if you will. So first of all, it's identifying what your goal is or what your ideal clinic day looks like. Followed by setting boundaries for ourselves to prioritize getting our notes done. And the third is observing interruptions and inefficiencies within our clinical day that cost us time. So in today's episode, I really want to expand on those second and third steps in the framework and present some concrete examples and options of how you can set boundaries

within your day, (that's step number two), and also minimize interruptions or distractions, (that is step number three). So the first thing that I want to introduce you to is the concept of time blocking. And this is something that some people use too. And that involves spending blocks of time or sometimes even hold days on a themed activity. And this isn't necessarily something that most of us can apply to our nurse practitioner roles. But there are some things that we can kind of steal from this practice and implement to make us more efficient. Because the reality is when we switch back and forth between tasks or ideas, or you know, things that we're doing, the task switching is inefficient and we lose time in doing that repetitively. So the more time that we can spend in one task or one concept or one skill, the better because we can easily get into that kind of flow state and, and get things done and not lose time or efficiency by switching back and forth. And a great example of in healthcare where some folks use time blocking on a daily basis would be some surgeons or providers who have procedure time. They might have themed days, right. So some may have certain days of the week that are designated OR days and certain days of the week that are designated clinic days. Or, some office settings might put all their new patients on one day of the week and follow ups on another day. On another day. These are sorts of Have time blocking example. So imagine if there was a surgeon who just kind of had an open schedule. And every day, they could either have a clinic visit, or a surgery scheduled, like think of the inefficiency of going from a clinic visit to scrubbing into an OR case to back to a clinic visit, you know, not just the inefficiency of scrubbing in out moving between the places, but actually being in a different brain space, you're going to be in a bit different brain space to do surgery than to have a clinic visit. So I know that I'm not likely talking to people who are used who are working in the OR here. But I want to use that as an example to explain how batching like activities, and being more efficient can really help you specifically with your your charting, or your inbox management, or whatever is your time suck of the day. So I think that a great way for NPs to use time blocking is for the activities outside of patient visits within our day. And like I said, the reality is that task switching or going back and forth between tasks, can really have us losing time and prevents us from getting into that flow state when we are nice and efficient. And we have many distractions in our day, including phone calls, emails, meetings, in basket messages, you name it, you know, we're fielding constant interruptions. So my question for you is, how can you get into a rhythm, where you have time dedicated for all those things that you know are going to happen, but rather than being reactive to them, you know, rather than waiting for the notifications and just responding to the notifications, can you be a bit more proactive, and create pockets of time, where you're going to do one thing? So for example, rather than checking your in basket, in between each patient at the expense of finishing your notes, could you plan to have three dedicated blocks of time, where you focus on just be in basket. So maybe it's the first 15 minutes of your day, 15 minutes before or after lunch, and then 30 minutes, at the end of the day, I'm using arbitrary times, but you will likely, once to start practicing this, you'll figure out how much time you actually need. Because if you're checking your in basket in between each patient, it will feel like you're checking your in basket all day. But you may find that if you decide, okay, I'm only going to check it three times a day, you'll realize how much time it actually takes you because you're you're focusing on that one activity. If you're not, if you're doing all different things all the time, it's really impossible for you to even predict how much time certain things are taking you. Okay, so you could do the same thing for email, and phone calls. There's always going to be something that you could be doing. And it's easy to feel this compulsion to check all the notifications all the time. But we will certainly be more efficient with our activities if we're dedicating time to those activities and avoiding distractions. So maybe that means having dedicated, you know, time in your office, when you're closing your door, you're turning off notifications. And you're setting a timer even you might even need to set a timer and say, Okay, this next 15 minutes or this next 30 minutes, I'm going to do all of this one activity. And I kind of mentioned this second tool, and the tool is using timers or using time bound techniques

to get things done. Okay, so the first concept we talked about is time blocking. And this next concept is using timers or time bound activities. So this one may sound silly, but bear with me, there is a theory called Parkinson's Law, which is the idea that work expands to fill the time allotted for its completion. And a great example of this is the procrastinators tendency to complete something the night before it is due. So technically, if that's you, you have let the project fill all that time. Versus deciding okay, I have this much time to do this one thing and I don't know if you've ever noticed this but you can challenge yourself and say okay, I'm going to challenge myself to get this note done in the next 60 seconds, or the next five minutes or whatever it is and play around with this you will find that work really does expand to fill the time that you give it. So when we're talking about time management and charting, Parkinson's Law is really working against us if we do not decide to make some of our tasks and some of our duties, time bound. Okay, so the first way is to implement this using just basic timers. So time blocking, which we just discussed, is a way of doing this too. So in Dr. Smith's episode, she started by saying to set goals for your day, and to get curious about what is taking up your time. And part of this process should be observing how long you're taking to currently do things. And this means not guessing, but actually taking a day or two to track your time, this may seem monotonous, but you know, jotting down your start and stop time for activities will be really illuminating and will tell you, where you're actually spending your time versus where you're perceiving you're spending your time. But you may find that those things that you think are taking up a lot of your time, aren't really- you're just putting them off because you hate doing them and so energetically, they're taking up a lot of your energy. But when you actually do it, you find out that it was a really, you know, not it was a task that did not take long at all. Once you know how long things take you, then you can create some time boundaries for yourself to be more productive. For example, if you know that you can finish a chart in a certain amount of time, you can compete against yourself and say, "Okay, I'm going to set a five minute timer to finish this chart and see if I can beat the timer". And we know there'll be exceptions to this rule, of course. But once you have kind of gotten curious about how long it takes you to do things, you can then use that information, to set timers for yourself to keep yourself on task. And to get more efficient. And doing this inside of time time blocking can really supercharge your productivity. For example, let's say you have reserved 30 minutes to catch up on charts, where you know, you want to leave by a certain time of day or the last 30 minutes of your day is always for charts, you can you know, set that and don't stray from it. That means you know not checking your notifications, but actually focusing on charting for that for those 30 minutes. And then even on top of that, you could say, "Okay, I know that it takes me on average five minutes to finish a chart. So I'm going to set the timer on my phone for five minutes". And and kind of do little blocks of five minutes inside of that time block of 30 minutes that you've set aside for yourself. This is just an example you can use this in whichever way feels best to you. Another timer method that I wanted to tell you about and that can be kind of fun is called the Pomodoro method. Pomodoro means tomato and Italian. I don't know how at all it's relevant to the method, I think it's just like a name for it has nothing to do with tomatoes. But you can download an app to your mobile device, just look for Pomodoro method or tomato timer. Essentially, it involves doing focused work for 15 minutes, followed by a 5... Sorry, focused work for 15 minutes followed by a five minute break. So if you have long stretches of time that you are working on something, let's say you have an admin day where you're working on a research project, or you're a student and you're working on a paper, for example, or you have a block of time where you're catching up on a lot of open charts. This method can really supercharge your productivity because it honors those refreshing breaks that you need for us for you to have some stamina over longer periods of time. So essentially, you're doing focused work for 15 minutes, then you're giving yourself a five minute break to do whatever. You can sit in silence, you can scroll your phone, you can you know putz around on the internet, whatever just doing something else other than that focused task that you have set

out to do. Again, that's called the Pomodoro method. So just to recap, these tips that we talked about, we first talked about time blocking, which is when you set aside a block of time or a theme day to get certain things done. And the second method is using timers or time bound techniques. And so you can actually use it just a regular basic timer on your phone where you're saying, Okay, I'm going to set myself X number of minutes to get this thing done. Or if you have longer stretches of focus time that you want to be more efficient in. You can use something like the Pomodoro method, which is a little bit fancier of a timer method because it's 15 minutes on, five minutes off, but all of this is really meant to help you to not only be more efficient, but also be curious and in mindful about where your time is going and get evidence to support that rather than what you perceive to be true. So I hope that this is helpful and I'd love to hear if you have any additional tips or tricks that help you with time management and productivity during your clinic day. Or during your, you know, if you work in patient during your time in the hospital, please, maybe send me a DM or tag me on Instagram @theresumerx. I'd love to hear about it. I'd love to share what's working for everyone else. And I hope you have a wonderful week and I'll catch you next week on the next episode!