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## Abstract

It is no secret that a career in nursing requires knowledge of a multitude of diseases and the processes that go with them. A lesser known truth, though, is that the foundations of nursing are built on the ideas and application of critical thinking. Critical thinking requires a person to analyze a situation thoroughly and, with a mix of learned material and intuition, make a decision as a result. The implication of critical thinking in nursing is especially prevalent in critical care areas, such as intensive care units and emergency departments. To ensure the best outcomes for critical patients, these nurses must think critically constantly, while also synthesizing data from assessments and labs, listening to the patient's feelings and concerns, and communicating with other health professionals. In the following case studies, I, the student, am learning to think like a critical care registered nurse by taking the pieces of patients' metaphorical puzzles and piecing them together. Where a layperson may simply see lab values and vital signs, a nurse must see so much more: deteriorating conditions, adequate disease management, and function improvement, to name just a few. Synthesis is crucial to nursing, and with the patients in these case studies, I use their data and my own assessments to get a greater idea of the illnesses they are fighting.

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