

Module 1 Extend Activity: Misunderstood

Subjective vs. Objective Patient Data

A concept commonly misunderstood in nursing school is knowing the difference between subjective vs. objective patient data and how to document these findings appropriately in the patient's chart. It is often mixed up because the learner doesn't fully understand the difference between the two types of assessment findings (subjective/objective). In some cases, subjective and objective patient data are meant to be combined in the chart, and other times, it should be documented separately. This will be dependent on the program/school/clinical-setting's required method of nursing documentation. For example, SOAP charting (1) *Subjective*, (2) *Objective*, (3) *Assessment*, (4) *Plan*, is one method to document patient assessment findings, whereas DARP charting (1) *Data*, (2) *Action*, (3) *Response*, and (4) *Plan* is another way to format documentation. If using SOAP charting, subjective and objective assessment findings are documented separately; However, if using DARP charting, both the subjective and objective data fall under the same umbrella 'Data'.

You can imagine how challenging it could be to document these findings if you are unsure of what is considered subjective patient data and what is considered objective. If students don't understand the difference between these two concepts early on, appropriate assessment and documentation becomes a major concern within the clinical setting. Factors contributing to this misunderstanding may relate to the way in which the learner is taught as students often express confusion during more in-depth patient assessments. Regardless of the student's level of experience and/or years in school, understanding the difference between the two concepts is necessary to practice safely and competently as student and/or working professional.

"Subjective for Symptoms VS. Objective for Observation"

An analogy that may help students remember the difference could be "**Subjective for Symptoms vs. Objective for Observation**". This at least reminds learners that subjective refers to the patients' symptoms i.e., what the patient is experiencing/feeling and that objective refers to what is observed i.e., what you as the assessor see.

Another analogy to further break this down could be "**Self-Symptoms vs. Our-Observation**". This may also help learners remember that symptoms are provided by the patient (subjective) and observation is what we assess/measure (objective).

Visual Metaphorical Representation: Subjective for Symptoms vs. Objective for Observation

