



VA OpenNotes for Mental Health Clinicians

C.L.E.A.R. Strategy

The C.L.E.A.R. strategy provides guidance to enhance note writing and avoid common pitfalls.

Connect

Connect the visit to the notes:

- Be transparent with patients during appointments to limit surprises
- Educate your patients about documentation requirements
- Show patients you have been listening by including details unique to each visit

Language

Be thoughtful about Language:

- Be thoughtful about terminology and acronyms; explain to patients as necessary
- Avoid stigmatizing or judgmental phrases
- Use language that mirrors how you speak with patients

Encourage

Encourage patient strengths and progress:

- Balance problems and deficits with patient strengths and resources
- Be descriptive rather than labeling
- Document goals and progress made toward recovery

Audience & Detail

Consider who may read the notes:

- Consider and write for the multiple audiences of notes, including the patient
- Think about which details are critical when documenting personal or sensitive information
- Include enough detail that another clinician could effectively assume care

Respect

Show Respect and be professional:

- Highlight patients' individuality and humanity (e.g. "a patient with schizophrenia" instead of "a schizophrenic;" "Mr. Johnson" instead of "Veteran")
- Be aware of the tone of your note
- Be respectful of patient identities and experiences (i.e. use preferred name or pronoun)