

EDITORIAL

Effective Communication Skills to aid Positive Doctor–Patient Relationship

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Patient satisfaction is achieved through the communication behaviors of doctors: Their dominance, concern about the psychosocial issues of the patient, illness perceptions, concordance between the doctor's communication style, the patient's need for attachment, and the patient's attitude. There are varied expectations and levels of patient satisfaction due to the omnipresent sociocultural matrix where the doctor–patient relationship is influenced by different cultural interpretations: Class, gender roles, ethos, language, and religious affiliation.

As the doctor's perception is what leads to patient satisfaction and clear evaluation during clinical judgment, there must be no "negative space" for communication; silence and related verbal and nonverbal actions, such as emotional detachment, may be intended to minimize the risk of injury to the doctor, the patient, or both. However, this behavior has the potential to produce a reactive sense of loneliness or abandonment in patients, reducing the quality of decision-making and the health care experience. However, from the doctor's perspective, silent times potentially benefit the patient as part of the therapeutic aims, enabling the patient to carry out an "internal search", identifying empowerment within the doctor–patient relationship.

The barriers created within doctor–patient communication, principally wishing to maintain a positive doctor–patient relationship and accepting the needs of patients, have changed with a responsibility to make the patient feel like they are being listened to, enabling patient empowerment. However, although they accepted the importance of their responsibility in not making the patients feel like they were burdening them, they recognized that the paternalistic approach of consultation still held place along with the humanistic approach. The majority of the interviewees expressed that if they were the patient they would like a "mix of the two."

Doctors play a pivotal role in the health care sector. Interpersonal communication forms the backbone of the doctor–patient relationship, which in turn is important for desirable outcomes in health care delivery systems. Patient care and treatment despite utmost dedication and sincerity at times does not deliver a healthy patient at the end of the day. Undesirable outcomes like death on table, drug reactions, and numerous other surgical and medical complications at times turn the serene environment in the corridors of health care institutions into a battlefield. Manhandling of doctors and health care staff by the agitated relatives of the patients has been on the rise.

Doctor–patient communication is such a powerful indicator of health care quality that it can determine patient's self-management behavior and health outcomes. The medical visit (i.e., the medical encounter) plays a pivotal role in the health care process. In fact, doctor–patient communication is one of the most essential dynamics in health care, affecting the course of patient care and patient compliance with recommendations for care.

Violent acts against workers have been defined as "any event that the worker is threatened or attacked by another person due to his job." The Health and Safety Executive defines violence as "any incident in which an employee is threatened or assaulted by a member of the public in circumstances arising out of the course of his/her employment."

The process of curing a patient requires a holistic approach which involves considerations beyond treating a disease. It warrants several skills in a doctor along with technical expertise. Studies have shown that good communication skills in a doctor improve patient's compliance and overall satisfaction. There are certain basic principles

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of practicing good communication. Patient listening, empathy, and paying attention to the paraverbal and non-verbal components of the communication are the important ones that are frequently neglected. Proper information about the nature, course, and prognosis of the disease is important. Besides, patients and attendants should always be explained about the necessity and yield of expensive investigations and risks/benefits involved in invasive procedures. One should be extremely cautious while managing difficult encounters and breaking bad news. Formal training of the doctors in improving communication skills is necessary and has proven to improve overall outcome. We recommend inclusion of formal training in communication skills in medical curriculum and training of practicing doctors in the form of Continuing Medical Education and Continuing Professional Education.

Recently, the medical system has witnessed an increase in the incidence of conflict between doctors and patients or their attendants. There has been an increase in both the number of lawsuits against doctors and the mass agitations by doctors. Such incidents are not only appalling but also ignominious for the noble medical profession. There is enough evidence in the literature to suggest that poor communication between doctors and patients is an important attributing factor. Good practices like detailed explanation by clinicians along with listening to the patients or their families have been found to decrease such incidences.

Various salient features of communication skills are as follows:

- Communication skills involve both style and content.
- Attentive listening skills, empathy, and use of open-ended questions are some examples of skillful communication.
- Improved doctor–patient communication tends to increase patient involvement and adherence to recommended therapy; influence patient satisfaction, adherence, and health care utilization; and improve quality of care and health outcomes.
- Breaking bad news to patients is a complex and challenging communication task in the practice of medicine. Relationship building is especially important in breaking bad news.
- Important factors include understanding patient's perspectives, sharing information and patient's knowledge and expectations. Miscommunication has serious implications, as it may hinder patient's understanding, expectations of treatment, or involvement in treatment planning.

- Miscommunication decreases patient satisfaction with medical care, level of hopefulness, and subsequent psychological adjustment.
- Patients often regard their doctors as one of their most important sources of psychological support. Empathy is one of the most powerful ways of providing this support to reduce patient's feelings of isolation and validating their feelings or thoughts as normal and to be expected.

Various elements of communications are face-to-face communication (body language, tone of voice, words), verbal communication, and physical communication. Basic listening skills are broadly classified as (1) self-awareness, (2) active listening (pay close attention, demonstrate physically that you are listening, check for understanding), (3) listening in difficult situations, (4) not interrupting, (5) responding appropriately. Effective written communications are classified mainly as (1) subject lines, (2) putting the main point first, (3) knowing your audience, (4) organization of the message.

Benefits of Good Communication Skills

The practice of good communication skills in the medical profession is integral for the development of meaningful and trustworthy relationship between the doctors and patients and, thus, is beneficial to both of them. The diagnostic capability of the doctor is greatly enhanced because of better understanding of patient's problems. Furthermore, it is also useful in managing difficult clinical encounters and thus decreases the frustration of both the doctor and the patient or attendant in situations of emotional outbursts. It has also been shown to decrease work stress and increase job satisfaction. Effective communication has three basic components: Verbal, nonverbal, and paraverbal. Verbal component deals with the content of the message including selection of the words. Nonverbal component includes body language like posture, gesture, facial expression, and spatial distance. Paraverbal component includes tone, pitch, pacing, and volume of the voice.

Communication involves getting information from one person to other person. It is the art and process of creating and sharing ideas. Effective communication depends on the richness of those ideas. Communication skills are those tools that we use to remove the barriers to effective communication. The communication process is composed of several stages (Source, Message, Encoding, Channel, Decoding, Receiver, Feedback, Context), each of which offers potential barriers to successful communication.