Medical Education – Is Realistic Communication the Key?
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Effective Clinical Communication - the final common pathway in practising Realistic Medicine

How we can train our health professionals and change our systems to enable the vision to become a reality?

1. How communication is the final common pathway in realising Realistic Medicine

2. Why clinical communication is central to excellence in healthcare
What emotion do you have?

And whose fault is it?

And is it a problem we’ve known about for years?
Initiating the interview

1. Discovering the reasons for the patient's attendance

Gathering information

2. Avoiding early closed questioning and actively listening

The prevention of clinical hypo-competence
54% of patients’ complaints and 45% of their concerns are not elicited (Stewart et al 1979)

in 50% of visits, the patient and the doctor do not agree on the nature of the main presenting problem (Starfield et al 1981)

consultations with problem outcomes are frequently characterised by unvoiced patient agenda items (Barry et al 2000)

doctors frequently interrupt patients so soon after they begin their opening statement that patients fail to disclose significant concerns (Beckman and Frankel 1984, Marvel et al 1999)

Mauksch et al (2008): literature review to explore the determinants of efficiency in the medical interview. 3 domains emerged from their study that can enhance communication efficiency: rapport building, upfront agenda setting and picking up emotional cues

Robinson et al (2016): Compared to “Do you have any questions?”, “any other concerns?” were significantly more likely to generate agenda items, especially when positioned ‘early’ vs. ‘late’ during visits
How much time do doctors spend talking to their patients?

- Time doctors spend speaking: 44%
- Time patients spend asking questions: 24%
- Time patients spend speaking: 0.07% of total consultation time
- Time doctors spend answering patient questions: 5%

after Butow, P. N., Dunn, S. M., Tattersall, M. H., & Jones, Q. J.
Health Literacy...

43% of English working age adults will struggle to understand instructions to calculate a childhood paracetamol dose.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very poor</td>
<td>May not be able to determine the amount of medicine to take</td>
<td>23%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Can only deal with well laid out simple material and tasks that are not complex</td>
<td>32%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adequate</td>
<td>Skills at or above level required for coping with demands of everyday life</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extreme</td>
<td>No skills to understand basic health information</td>
<td>4%</td>
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What would happen if we simply manage to implement:

• Managing the beginning of new and review consultations
• Effective listening and open history taking
• Discovering the patient’s ideas and concerns
• Lack of inappropriate jargon
• Interactivity in explanation phase
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- Managing the beginning of new and review consultations
- Effective listening and open history taking
- Discovering the patient’s ideas and concerns
- Lack of inappropriate jargon
- Interactivity in explanation phase
- Basic courtesy, removing hubris
- Effective non-verbal communication
- Basic language skills
- Understanding that people have feelings and demonstrating empathy
Demonstrating empathy overtly

Improve clinical outcomes
Wissow et al (1994) found that paediatricians’ use of supportive statements (compliments, approval, concern, empathy, encouragement and reassurance) was positively associated with parents’ disclosure of psychosocial problems.

Wasserman et al (1984) found that empathic statements led to increased satisfaction and reduction in maternal concerns.

Dimoska et al (2008) have shown that patients seeing an oncologist who was rated as warmer and discussed a greater number of psychosocial issues had better psychological adjustment and reduced anxiety.


Cox et al (2011) showed that when physicians expressed empathy, patients’ weight-related attitudes and behaviours improved.

Rakel et al (2011) found that physician empathy had significant effects on reducing the duration and patient reported severity of the common cold.

Hojat et al (2011) correlated physician empathy scores on a self completed empathy scale with HBA 1C and LDL-cholesterol tests and found a positive relationship between physicians’ empathy and patients’ clinical outcomes.

In a study of 20,961 patients, Canale et al (2012) compared physician empathy scores with clinical outcomes for patients with diabetes: significantly lower rate of metabolic complications.
Open questions
Open directive questions
Screening questions
Listening
Pauses/use of silence
Minimal prompts
Summarising

The emergence of cues

Picking up cues
- Acknowledging/reflection
- Paraphrasing
- Checking
- Clarifying
- Exploring
- Educated guesses
- Empathy
Cues - will it take more time?

Consultations which were cue based were shorter than those in which cues were missed
- GP consultations 12.5%
- Surgical consultation were 10.7% shorter

Levinson et al 2000

In oncology consultations, addressing cues reduced consultation times by 10-12%.

Butow et al 2002
Picking up and responding to cues

Improved efficiency
The central importance of Effective clinical communication to High quality healthcare
• More effective interviews:
  ↑ accuracy
  ↑ efficiency
  ↑ supportiveness
• Enhanced patient and health professional satisfaction
• Improved health outcomes for patients
Plan: Effective Clinical Communication - the final common pathway in practising Realistic Medicine

How we can **train our health professionals** and **change our systems** to enable the vision to become a reality?

1. How communication is the final common pathway in realising Realistic Medicine

2. Why clinical communication is central to excellence in healthcare

3. How can we **train** our health professionals
Not easy to get the medical interview right

• highly skilled
• complex
• multi-faceted
• professional challenge

Needs careful attention and cannot be left to chance
Requires thoughtful consideration and planning
there is conclusive evidence that communication skills can be taught

and that communication skills teaching is retained
Aspergren K (1999)
Teaching and Learning Communication Skills in Medicine: a review with quality grading of articles
Medical Teacher 21 (6)

Teaching Patient Communication Skills to Medical Students: a review of randomised controlled trials
Evaluation and the Health Professions 30 (1)
- Overwhelming evidence for positive effect of communication training
- Medical students, residents, junior doctors, senior doctors
- Specialists and general practice equally
- Those at the bottom end improve most
Asking the Right Questions Matters

To help ensure you have all the information you need to make the right decisions about your care, please ask your doctor or nurse:

- Is this test, treatment or procedure really needed?
- What are the potential benefits and risks?
- What are the possible side effects?
- Are there simpler, safer or alternative treatment options?
- What would happen if I did nothing?
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