

Communication Skills

CHS 446

Communication Skills for the Healthcare Professional

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Interviewing Techniques

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An important and fundamental step in providing medical care is the patient interview. To properly diagnose the patient's conditions and to develop the appropriate treatment plan, the healthcare professional, needs to obtain thorough and accurate medical history from the patient.

Interviewing Techniques

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There are three primary functions of the medical interview:

- ❖ Information gathering**
- ❖ Relationship building**
- ❖ Patient education**

Interviewing Techniques

Patient Interview

There are two common approaches to the patient interview:

- ❖ **The primary care provider only approach, primary care providers interview the patient themselves. In this way the patient is required to relate their medical history only once.**
- ❖ **The team approach, the patient is interviewed more than once. The first interview is conducted by a member of the healthcare team, such as a nurse or a medical assistant. This is followed by a subsequent interview conducted by the primary provider, such as a physician, physician assistant, or nurse practitioner.**

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Patient Interview

- ❖ The practitioner patient relationship is often an unequal one.
- ❖ Healthcare Professionals are knowledgeable about their area of practice and the patient is dependent upon this expertise
- ❖ HCP should display an attitude of competence and professionalism and also communicate a sense of trust and confidentiality.

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The Interviewee

The patient is typically the primary source of medical information for this reason; the HCP will interview the patient directly.

There are also instances in which the patient may be unable to provide their medical history directly to the practitioner.

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The Interviewee

Patients who are critically ill, or even unconscious, mentally impaired, or very young cannot effectively communicate with their caregivers.

In these cases, other sources are necessary to provide the required medical information.

- ❖ **Family Members**
- ❖ **Other healthcare team members**
- ❖ **Medical records**

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The Interviewee

The presence of family members during the visit may offer many significant benefits during the medical interview.

- ❖ **Family members may help communicate the patient's concerns to the HCP**
- ❖ **Improve the HCPs understanding of the patient's problem**
- ❖ **Improve the patient's understanding of the diagnosis and treatment**
- ❖ **Help the patient to remember clinical information and recommendation**
- ❖ **Express concerns regarding the patient**
- ❖ **Assist the patient in making decisions**

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The Setting

The interview between the HCP and the patient may take place face-to-face in the doctor's office or in a hospital or a clinic.

- ❖ Patients should be escorted to an area that is both private and comfortable, usually the examination room.**
- ❖ This way patient confidentiality is maintained**
- ❖ The HCP provider is able to observed any nonverbal behaviors exhibited by the patient**
- ❖ These observations which may be helpful in diagnosing the patient or in developing the treatment plan should be noted on the medical history form.**

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The Setting

The patient interview may also take place on the telephone.

- ❖ In this case, the HCP is unable to observe the patient's facial expressions, cannot make eye contact with the patient, and is unable to receive any visual feedback, such as body language.**
- ❖ Instead the practitioner conducting the interview relies on the patient's tone, pacing of speech, and word selection to interpret their condition and attitude.**

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Type of Questions

There are two types of questions that the HCP will ask the patient during the interview:

Closed direct questions and **open-ended** questions.

- ❖ Closed questions are designed to elicit short, focused responses such as simple **yes** and **no**.
- ❖ Have you ever had rheumatic fever?
- ❖ Have you ever had jaundice or hepatitis?
- ❖ Do you use tobacco?

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Type of Questions

Other examples of **closed questions**

- ❖ Where does it hurt?
- ❖ Did you have a fever this morning?
- ❖ Closed questions quickly provide a great deal of objective information about the patient.
- ❖ The HCP will only have 15 minutes with the patient, and these questions will allow for the most efficient communication.

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Type of Questions

Open-ended questions

- ❖ Conversely much important information, both objective and subjective, regarding the current physical and emotional conditions of the patient can be obtained only by way of open-ended questions.
- ❖ These questions often begin with **who, what, where, when, how, and why.**
- ❖ Open-ended questions cannot be answered simply and require more discussion regarding a given health issue.

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Type of Questions

Open-ended questions

- ❖ These are the questions that help to establish therapeutic communication and relationship between the patient and the HCP
- ❖ The patient is required to provide more explanation when responding to these questions.
- ❖ Open-ended questions often begin with how or what. Examples of these questions include the following:
 - ❖ How are your stress levels at work?
 - ❖ How does this pain feel like?

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Type of Questions

Open-ended questions

- ❖ Open-ended statements may also be useful
- ❖ Describe when this occurs
- ❖ Give me an example
- ❖ Why don't you take your medication?
- ❖ Why did you do that?
- ❖ There may be no one true answer to the why question, as a patient's motivation is often complex.

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Type of Questions

Open-ended questions

- ❖ In addition, these questions may be perceived as confrontational.
- ❖ The patient may feel as though they have to defend themselves, this likely to inhibit further communication and damage the therapeutic relationship between the practitioner and the patient.
- ❖ On the other hand, there are times when “WHY” questions are useful.

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Type of Questions

Open-ended questions

- ❖ For example, to engage in true collaborative decision making it is necessary for the HCP to know what motivates the patient.
- ❖ The HCP will often need to ask the patient about the factors that might influence their ability to follow a certain treatment regimen.
- ❖ Why are concerned about taking this medication?
- ❖ Why are you worried about starting this diet?

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Type of Questions

Open-ended questions

- ❖ These questions are meant to improve the HCP's understanding of how the patient feels about a given issue.
- ❖ The use of leading questions and statements should be avoided
- ❖ “I assume you have shortness of breath.”
- ❖ These types of questions or statements are likely to prompt or encourage the patient to provide what they perceive is the desired answer.

Interviewing Techniques

Type of Questions

Open-ended questions

- ❖ If the patient does not fully understand the content of the question, they may be compelled to simply go along with the HCP to avoid appearing disagreeable.
- ❖ These responses may in fact, be inaccurate and have a negative impact on the medical interview.
- ❖ Indirect statements are used to establish therapeutic communication and relationship between the practitioner and the patient.
- ❖ “till me about the diet you are on”

Interviewing Techniques

The HCP-centered Interview versus the Patient-centered Interview

- ❖ Consider the following interview between a healthcare professional and their patient:
- ❖ HCP: “What brings you here today?”
- ❖ Patient: “I have chest pain.”
- ❖ HCP: “How severe is it?” “When does it occur?” “What do you do to relieve it?”
- ❖ This is an example of a healthcare centered interview where the healthcare provider controls the dialog.

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The HCP-centered Interview versus the Patient-centered Interview

The stream of questions in response to the patient's first complaint may, in fact, interrupts the patient, and may prevent the patient from continuing to express all of their concerns.

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The HCP-centered Interview versus the Patient-centered Interview

- ❖ Contrast the previous interview with the following interview:
- ❖ HCP: “What brings you here today?”
- ❖ Patient: “I have chest pain.”
- ❖ HCP: “What else?”
- ❖ Patient: “I have been having a lot of trouble sleeping.”
- ❖ HCP: “Anything else?”
- ❖ Patient: “Well I have been very worried about my job .I am afraid that I may be laid off.”

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The HCP-centered Interview versus the Patient-centered Interview

- ❖ **This is an example of a patient-centered interview where the HCP uses “continuers” expressions that encourage the patient to reveal all of their concerns at the beginning of the interview.**
- ❖ **The HCP allows the patient to tell their story and guides the patient to provide the important details by using both open-ended questions and indirect statements as well as specific closed questions. This approach provides the best information**

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The HCP-centered Interview versus the Patient-centered Interview

- ❖ **This approach provides the best information.**
- ❖ **The use of continuers also contributes to the development of relationship between the HCP and their patient at the outset of their interaction.**
- ❖ **Finally the patient-centered approach allows the HCP to be more attentive to the nonverbal messages expressed by the patient.**