Communication Skills’ In Medicine

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Abstract
Communication skill is a dynamic process which involves an exchange of information between two parties to convey thoughts or feelings. There are two types of communication skills, verbal (spoken words), and non-verbal (body language, visual images, written words). Communication is the most important factor for effective medical interview (from simple history taking to breaking bad news). Principles of effective communication include good planning, show of empathy and learning how to handle difficult emotional outbreaks. In conclusion, communication skills play an important role in achieving good medical practice and should be a part of training programmes of students and doctors.

Keywords: Communication skills, Medical education, Continuing professional education.

INTRODUCTION

The Communication Process
- Is a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs or information? So it is the process by which we relate and interact with other people.
- It is a mutual process between 2 sides (Dialogue) not a one sided monologue.
- It includes listening and understanding with passion and respect as well as expressing views and ideas and passing information to others in a clear manner.
- Therefore communication is a dynamic process...through this process we convey a thought or feeling to someone else. How it is received depends on a set of events, stimuli, that person is exposed to. How you say what you say plays an important role in communication.

COMMUNICATION THEORY

Communication is natural process which may be intentional or unintentional
It may involve conventional or non-conventional signals. It may occur through spoken or other modes. But to have effective communication the theory said

Communication is a learned skill or a series of learned skills which is based on 3 pillars:
- Accuracy
- Efficiency
- Supportiveness

All combine to contribute to effectiveness of communication
Experience is a poor teacher: it needs observation with well intentioned, constructive, detailed and descriptive feedback plus rehearsal to effect change.
Communication is an art and like other arts it is a learned skill, which is influenced by presence of special gift or talent in some persons.

Types of Communication

Verbal Spoken Word and listening
Non verbal
- Body language
- Visual Images
- written

All communication methods are important but the spoken word is the most common used one and about 70 % or all our communication efforts are:
Misunderstood, misinterpreted, rejected, disliked, distorted, or not heard (in the same language, same culture. That is why we should train our self for effective communication.

How Communication is done?

The medical interview is the most common communication usually encounter between the doctor and the patient. It can be classified according to the purpose of the interview into 4 types:

- History taking
- Breaking bad news
- Consultations
- Obtaining informed consent

But others type of communications is necessary like with:
- Nurses and auxiliary staff
- Colleagues
- Administrators
- Evidence in court
- Reporting research findings
- Talking to the media
- Public and legislature

Effective communication

Ensures good working relationship
Increases patients satisfaction
Increases patients understanding of illness and management
Improves patients compliance with treatment
Ensures an interaction rather than a direct transmission process (telling someone what to do or only listening is not enough)

Principles of effective communication

Requires planning and thinking in terms of outcomes.
Follows the helical model (i.e. what I say influences what you say in a spiral fashion and coming back around the spiral of communication at a little different level each time is essential).
Shows empathy and learn how to handle emotional outbreaks.
Communicate as a team patient, family, physician, and other health care providers
Communication with peers i.e. Mutual trust and respect, exchange information, ask your seniors, do your share of work, Communicate with patients in peers, Seminar and workshops help in good communication.

Barriers to effective communication

- Personal attitudes e.g., some clinicians focus often on relieving patients' bodily pain, less often on their emotional distress, seldom on their suffering, and Some of them view suffering as beyond their professional responsibilities
- Language
Time management
Working environment
Ignorance
Human failings (tiredness, stress)
Inconsistency in providing information

How to develop a good (Doctors - Patients’ Relationship)

- Gauging the correct amount, and type of information to give to each individual patient.
- Providing explanations that the patient can remember and understand and which relate to the patient’s illness framework.
- Using an interactive approach to ensure a shared understanding of the problem with the patient.
- Involving the patient and collaborative planning increase the patient's commitment and adherence to plans made.
- Continuing to build a relationship and provide a supportive attitude.
- Establishing a supportive environment.
- Developing an awareness of the patient’s emotional state.
- Identifying as far as possible all the problems or issues that the patient has come to discuss.
- Establishing an agreed agenda or plan for the consultation.
- Enabling the patient to become part of a collaborative process
- Closing the interview
- Confirming the established plan of care.
- Clarifying next steps for both doctor and patient.
- Establishing contingency plans.
- Maximizing patient adherence and health outcomes.
- Making efficient use of time in the consultation.
- Continuing to allow the patient to feel part of a collaborative process and to build the doctor-patient relationship for the future.

Questions to ask yourself after each consultation
- Was I curious?
- Do I know significantly more about this person as a human being than before they came through the door?
- Did I listen?
- Did I make an acceptable working diagnosis?
- Did I explore their beliefs?
- Did I use their beliefs when I started explaining?
- Did I share options for investigations or treatment?
- Did I share in decision-making?
- Did I make some attempt to see that my patient understood?
- Did I develop the relationship?

DIFFICULT SITUATIONS

Dealing with emotional Patients

- Set an example: don’t ask patients to calm down, model calmness.
- Get patients’ attention: lower your voice, move so they must turn in your direction.
- Encourage them to sit down but let them control their emotions at their pace.
- Listen not just to the patient’s needs, but also for underlying issues/concerns and unexpressed expectations.
- The use of “uh- huh” and “um” has been shown to help patients settle down on their own. Feels like a lot of time, but really isn’t.
- Avoid arguments, use disarming statements.
- Consider rolling with the resistance and agreeing with the patient if possible.
- Take a step back from the demand and ask probing questions to find underlying concerns. This may change a rant into a conversation.
- Don’t assume things, ask to find out
- Don’t get emotionally involved, keep your professional attitude.
- Don’t give false reassuring comments.
- Say no in a tactful manner to the patient’s unrealistic wishes and demands.

Breaking Bad News

Clinicians are responsible for delivering bad news, this skill is rarely taught in medical schools, clinicians are generally poor at it. Breaking bad news is one of a physician’s most difficult duties. Medical education typically offers little formal preparation for this task. Many health care professionals tend to define 'bad news' as worst case scenarios (eg. telling a patient they have cancer or that their loved one has died).

In general terminal patients are not afraid from death but are terrified from the absence of their beloved ones and the caregivers when needed

Message to take home

Communication between the client family and heath team play a vital role in the compliance to outpatient clinic visits and in-patient care programs.

Good communication is essential for proper doctor-patient relationship and help avoids problems of misunderstanding.

Effective communication is the key to success in professional career.
REFERENCES


