Effective Communication Skills Facilitates Better Health Care Delivery

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ABSTRACT

Effective communication skills are important health care delivery. Communication is a key skill required to be mastered by medical students for gaining competency in achieving excellence in patient management. Effective communication helps the learner to get to understand and know their patient better, help to establish a good rapport with patients, understand patients perspective especially pertaining to their misconceptions, fears and worries and eventually this shall build the patients trust in the doctor. These facts gave us an impetus to explore the pub med, scopus and other index journals to review the importance of communication in medical practice. A rapport with patients further strengthens the interactive emotion expression between doctors and patients and eventually patient develop confidence towards his doctor, trusting him, his medications and so also become confident that he will recover faster. Thus to conclude the respectful, non judgmental non-threatening and empathetic communication of doctors with patient is the most vital aspects of effective health care delivery to the patients.

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INTRODUCTION:
Communication is a key skill required to be mastered by medical students for gaining competency in achieving excellence in patient management. Eliciting detail patient history is an art (1). The medical students need to be very respectful towards his/her patients and must not converse in any way which appears to be threatening. The genuine concern for addressing patients suffering and need should be the goal and moreover the patient’s literacy level should also be considered while eliciting patient medical history. The essential qualities to be imbibed in a medical student are their eagerness, interest and readiness to learn. Effective communication will help the learner to get to understand and know their patient better, help to establish a good rapport with patients, understand patients perspective especially pertaining to their misconceptions, fears and worries and eventually this shall build the patients trust in the doctor (2,3). It is important for medical students to understand the attitude and patient’s outlook towards life as assessing these carefully will help to keep patients informed about their illness and so also motivate them for accepting treatment remedies for faster recovery (4,5).

These facts gave us an impetus to explore the pub med, scopus and other index journals to review the importance of communication in medical practice

MATERIAL AND METHODS
We decided to review the perspective of effective communication between doctor and patients in patient health care thorough literature search of all recently published articles from various data bases such as Medline, Pub Med and World Health Organization website. The articles which were published as per national and international guidelines and recommendation of International Committee of Medical Journal Editors had been included in our review.

DISCUSSION

(2) effective methodology for opening the discussion; (3) gathering suitable information at time of recording patient history of illness; (4) understanding the patient's perspective; (5) sharing information with patients; (6) discuss and arrive at common consensus regarding the problems and plans; and (7) provide closure.

Communication, Purpose and Modes of Communication
Communication as per Merriam Webster Dictionary is a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behavior. It has also been referred as "an apparent answer to the painful divisions between one self and other party which can be either private or
public, or between inner thought and outer world. It is a process of transmitting and exchanging information among individuals. It is a two way process either between two persons or may involve a group of people (4, 6).

**Purpose for Communication (3,7)**
The main purpose for communication in hospital setting is for:

1. Eliciting and recording the clinical history of his illness, patients past medical history, family history, occupational history and to pass necessary instructions while examining the patients.
2. Informing patients regarding his health status and available treatment modalities.
3. To health educate the patients regarding precautionary measures to be taken for preventing complications or future infection episodes, practicing any life style intervention practices such as exercise and dietary care, intake of medication, regarding modes of communication of diseases etc.
4. For supporting the emotions of patients so as to build confidence in them (8).
5. For providing counseling to the patients.
6. For developing rapport with the patients.
7. Receiving feedback from patients regarding his health after availing treatment.
8. Solving any questions or worried posed by the patient regarding their health condition.

**The various modes of Communication include (1,2) :**

1. Verbal Communication: This involves an interaction in a speech is carried out as a face to face conversation r may be telephonically or video-conferencing.
2. Nonverbal communication: Such type of communication is through expressions of gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, postural and body movement orientation, touch interaction, and any other way without any act of speech is involved.
3. Written Communication: This involves expression of thoughts and ideas via writing mode and this may be mainly as letters, emails, memos, circulars etc.
4. Visual Communication: It involves depicting of thoughts, ideas and emotions with the help of signboards, sketch diagram, photographs, drawing etc.

**Communication Process (4,9)**
The process of communication involves several important processes which includes

(a) Conceptualizing of thoughts by the sender which they feel is to be conveyed
(b) Message encoding: This is done through verbal or non verbal means and the central nervous systems brocas area of speech and exners area of writing speech are proactive in process of encoding
(c) Message is finally addressed and understood by the sender prior to sending it.
(d) The channel for communication the next important component of communication process which is decided by the sender.
(e) The message is received by the recipient and is comprehensively understood and decoded by the recipient.
(f) Once the recipient confirms or affirms the sender that the information is conveyed through verbal/ non verbal means confirms the communication process.
Developing Basic Skills for Effective Patient Centric Communication

The key responsibilities of the teaching clinicians are to ensure that the students learn the art of effective communication.

The modalities of effective Patient Centric Communication ensure that (8,9,10):

1. The interaction with patient must be directed towards patient-centered care. The art of history taking must ensure that any questions posed to the patients must be open-ended questions at the initial stages of conversation for recording patient’s health profile.
2. The patient should not be interrupted from expressing their thoughts. A careful listening to the patients thoughts and expression with verbal or non verbal expression such as nod and smile will help building patients confidence.
3. The patients should never be left engaged as an active listener only.
4. The patient’s perspective of their diseases should be well understood especially their ideas, worries and concerns. This will also help understanding the patient’s expectation from treating doctor.
5. The medical student / trainee doctor should be empathetic towards patients. The ideal way of showing empathy with the patient is expressing solidarity with their feelings and emotions but also rendering a respectful, non judgmental support to patient’s illness experience and associated emotional manifestations.
6. Developing personal rapport with patient and develop affectionate and sympathetic relationship with patients.
7. The medical students should carefully discuss regarding revealing of diagnosis to patients, and if required in case of critical illness or minor to their relatives.
8. Shared decision making with patients considering the pros and cons of available treatment options and rehabilitative measures.
9. Overall physical, mental and social wellbeing of patients.

The key components of effective communication strategies include (2,3,4):

1. Self Introduction of oneself to the patients so that they are aware of expertise of doctors.
2. Developing rapport with patients.
3. Developing optimistic, caring, respectful and positive interpersonal behaviors.
4. Active listening to patients.
5. Empathy with patients in all situations.

Communication and Challenging Occasions to be addressed in hospital setup include (3):

1. Delivering sad news to patients relative especially that of death of patients.
2. Information regarding critical condition of patient to the patients.
3. Communication with upset patient or patient’s relative in OPD / IPD.
4. Discussing regarding treatment modalities and cost of treatment especially to the poor patients.
5. Communicating with hearing impaired patient.
6. Communicating with patient or their relatives after receiving negative feedback regarding the treatment which was given.

Emotions and Communication

The medical doctor is looked as a savior by his patients for relief from their illness and sufferings. In such a context a doctor needs to maintain their emotional compose, be calm and maintain poise, be cheerful, have patience listening to patient”s complaints, be empathetic towards the patients and provide the best available care as expected of his / her competency level. Hence it is very necessary that doctors have suitable emotional intelligence which is earmarked by one’s ability to monitor his own and others” feelings and emotions so as to effectively discriminate the emotional input and thereof take appropriate thinking and action. The trainee doctors should be groomed to improve their emotional vocabulary, as well made aware of using appropriate verbs and adjectives while expressing their thoughts to the patients because the words, facial expressions and body language expressions have a deep impact in patients in
understanding their physical health conditions as well provide solace to them for an early recovery from the ailments (10,11).

As doctors are also at receiving end after sharing their thoughts; they should be able to appraise expressions of emotions of their patients and their responses should be communicatively adapt. This art of comprehending others emotion and getting the expression of same feeling in oneself may help learn becoming empathetic (12,13)

The empathetic nature in doctors is vital in patients recovery as this has great social and physical implications such as it boost physiological effects on human body like lowering stress levels, makes person emotionally happy, lessens anxiety and helps developing optimism and psychological and mental wellbeing (14,15).

CONCLUSION

A rapport with patients further strengthens the interactive emotion expression between doctors and patients and eventually patient develop confidence towards his doctor, trusting him, his medications and so also become confident that he will recover faster. Thus to conclude the respectful, non judgmental non-threatening and empathetic communication of doctors with patient is the most vital aspects of effective health care delivery to the patients.

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