

## Patient-Centred Practice

### Quick Tips

#### **Managing patient expectations**

- Recognize that patients arrive with preconceived expectations about your practice.
- Minimize discrepancy between patients' expectations and their experience by making your service consistent, while customizing your individual encounters.
- Encourage your patients to reveal their expectations of you and your practice.
- Determine patients' level of knowledge about appointment structure.
- Educate them through conversation or the distribution of the NLMA brochure, "*Make the Most of Your Doctor's Visit.*"
- Recognize that patients judge medical experiences by interpersonal skills rather than clinical skills.

#### **Communication gaps can occur when**

- One party is distracted.
- The patient speaks limited English.
- Minority cultural groups do not share mainstream health beliefs.
- Information is unclear or too complex.
- Individuals have low health literacy (the ability to obtain, process, and understand health information).

#### **Fostering physician-patient relationships**

- Make eye contact.
- Use plain language that most patients will understand.
- Communication can be improved by speaking slowly.
- Clearly explain risks, benefits and alternatives to any considered interventions.
- Show models or draw pictures to enhance patient understanding and recollection.
- Limit the amount of information given at each visit and repeat it (focus on critical messages).
- Do not assume a patient understands instructions if they do not ask questions.
- Ask patients to repeat back or demonstrate what you have told them.
- Use only "patient-friendly" written materials.
- Provide staff assistance to patients who have difficulty completing forms.

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#### **Patient-Centred Communication Skills**

- When welcoming the patient set an agenda for the discussion.
- Refer to your patient by name throughout the consultation.
- Invite the patient to tell you about something non-medical in their life. Make a note in your records and refer to it during your next visit.
- Acknowledge the reason given to reception staff for the patient's visit.
- Determine patient expectations by asking, "What were you hoping to accomplish at this visit today?"
- Listen to the patient's story without interrupting.
- Summarize the information to show the patient you listened.
- Empathize and express genuine interest in why you have been consulted (this does not always mean agreeing).
- Explain your conclusions and check for patient understanding.
- Encourage patients to ask questions.
- Ask patients if they have any concerns that have not been addressed.

#### **Build Quality Relationships**

- Create an environment where patients feel comfortable asking questions.
- Focus on the patient as an individual.
- Be nonjudgmental; patients will be more likely to reveal problems.
- Be willing to temporarily shift from the medical agenda and listen to personal problems that could be affecting the patient's well-being.
- Listen not only for details or facts, but also for emotion, behaviour and intentions.
- Respect boundaries and preferences. Advise patients you will be available to talk about uncomfortable issues at another time if they appear unwilling.
- Effective listening requires attention, patience, and suppressing the urge to control the conversation.
- Do not pretend to listen; people can sense superficial interest.
- Consider that some patients may have difficulty completing forms if you receive one that is incomplete or incorrectly completed.
- Assure patients that many people have difficulty reading and understanding medical information and offer your assistance.
- Include patients in decision making; they will become more compliant to treatment and self-care regimens.
- Promote partnerships and encourage patients to take responsibility for their own health.