

Negotiates and uses psycho-social information in plan

Green – Negotiates with the patient towards a safe outcome and those options that fit best with his/her life

Red – Avoids discussion of areas of potential conflict with patient and thereby fails to address potential risk or inappropriate treatment

About this skill

Many GP consultations involve a degree of negotiation, and such cases can cause major problems for trainees. Negotiation is most commonly required to persuade patients to adopt a particular management plan, as in the examples below.

- Patients who request unsafe or unhelpful or overly expensive treatments (for example, strong opiates for mechanical back pain) when the doctor needs to negotiate towards an alternative treatment plan
- Patients who would be helped by a change in their lifestyle (for example, stopping smoking, or losing weight) but are initially reluctant to make these changes
- Patients who would be helped by a particular type of medication (for example lipid-lowering medication) but are initially unwilling to consider such treatment
- Patients who need to be admitted, but have other plans which they are reluctant to abandon in order to access hospital care
- Patients who have disengaged from their management plan and need to be persuaded that this treatment is still important

Less commonly, but importantly, negotiation skills may be needed to:

- Persuade a patient to accept a particular line of questioning
- Persuade a patient about the accuracy of a particular diagnosis
- Persuade the patient about the importance of follow up or safety netting

Some useful generic strategies for negotiation include:

- Use the information you have already collected earlier in the consultation. This includes information about the patient's psychosocial background, and their expectations. *For example, imagine you are trying to persuade a mobile hairdresser to stop driving following a seizure. You may be able to use information about the patient's work to suggest a change from mobile to salon work, or to enlist the help of the patient's currently unemployed teenage daughter as a part-time chauffeur.*
- Never begin negotiation until you have collected sufficient information to allow you to negotiate successfully. Some of the information may already be available from earlier in the consultation. Other information may have to be sought as part of the negotiation process
- Always ask yourself the question - "Why?" So if a patient refuses a particular treatment option, or demands what you think might be a risky treatment option, then try to explore the patient's reasons for taking this approach.
- Try and find out what is really important for the patient and begin the negotiation from this point, rather than from what you think is important. For example, if a patient is over-using Diazepam, explore if the

patient has any concerns about the amount of medication he is taking. Let's say that the patient is fed up with being drowsy all the time - then use this problem as the starting point for your negotiation. If you start by accusing the patient of being addicted to Diazepam the negotiation will soon break down. If by contrast, you start by asking - *"Would you be interested in improving your drowsiness by gradually reducing your dose of Diazepam but managing your anxiety in other ways....?"* - then this approach is likely to meet with more interest

- Don't feel you have to achieve everything in one consultation. For example, stopping smoking is a big ask for a patient and all you may be able to achieve is for the patient to think about stopping or perhaps be willing to speak to the practice nurse about stopping.
- Always be clear about your *own limits*. For example, if a patient wants a month's supply of sleeping tablets, then giving this amount of medication may be something you would never ever do - your limit. But you may be prepared to give a five-day course, along with sleep advice, and be able to negotiate towards this - and this may be enough to satisfy the patient. Never promise something you cannot give - this will quickly lead to a breakdown of trust

Audio consultations

One common topic for negotiation in an audio consultation is whether or not to agree to a patient request for a face-to-face consultation or even a home visit. This emphasises the importance of careful history taking. In order to negotiate effectively, you need to have accurate information about the presenting problem and a good idea of patient concerns and expectations. Another useful tip is not to rush to judgements too early - if you approach the patient's request with an open mind and collect relevant information, then your final decision is more likely to be respected.

Educational Activities

Activity 1: Review a series of consultations where you are trying to persuade the patient to adopt a change in their lives that they initially reject. (for example - stopping smoking - starting or stopping medication - dietary change etc). Write down which strategies you used in each case. Repeat this process with some of your trainer's consultations. Which strategies does he/she use? Are they more or less effective?

Activity 2: Role play some scenarios with your trainer where negotiation with the patient is needed. (some possible examples are given above). Swap so you can see how your trainer negotiates. Remember to use the information gathered about the patients' life to adapt your approach.

Activity 3: Practice useful phrases that you feel comfortable using in a negotiation situation. Possible phrases include: *"Tell me why you are so doubtful that this will work?"* - *"Can you think of any problems with what you suggest"* - *"As your doctor, I understand... but I am also concerned"* - *"If I could suggest some ways to help your symptoms without you having to take the same dose of medication...would you be interested?"*

Activity 4: Think of a scenario where you have had to negotiate with a family member or friend about their behaviour. What worked? Can you adapt this to negotiating with patients? e.g. A teenage child who wants to stay up past their bedtime. It rarely works if you simply forbid the activity without some negotiation or empowering the teenager to form their own judgements! Practise your skills with your family/friends.

Audio consultations

Review a series of audio consultations where the patient was asking for something that caused you some disquiet. (for example, a home visit, a prescription for antibiotics). How did you deal with these requests? Ask yourself - did you collect enough information earlier in the consultation to deal with these requests? - did you

persuade the patient to consider a different option? - was the patient involved in the final plan?

Reflective Exercises

Exercise 1: Negotiation skills are very important in business and management. A lot of the negotiation skills that are used in the business environment are transferable to healthcare. Listen to this (very entertaining) radio programme about business negotiation which appeared in the Radio 4 series "The Bottom Line" (link below). Write down any ideas from this programme that you think might be worth using in your negotiation with patients.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b07gh583>

Related tasks

Practicing and developing the skill of '*Negotiates and uses psycho-social information in plan*' will allow you to achieve the following tasks more effectively:

- Discovers patient's psycho-social context
- Identifies cues
- Discovers patient's ICE
- Offers a safe patient centred management plan
- Provides follow up/safety net

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