

Uses clear language

Green – Uses clear language that is easily understandable to the patient

Red – Fails to use clear language, often using technical language and/or medical jargon

Green – Language is adjusted according to a patient's language skills, educational level and cultural background

Red – Does not adjust language to take into account patients' educational and/or cultural background

About this global skill

Confusing or over-technical language may prevent the patient being involved in the consultation and damage rapport. Language also needs to be adapted to allow for the patients' educational level and cultural context and this is impossible to achieve unless you have discovered the patient's psychosocial information and ICE.

If a patient does not understand a diagnosis and subsequent management, they may also feel unsupported and the outcome of the consultation will be unsatisfactory. Similarly, if a patient does not understand the reasons for follow up and when to reconsult, this could produce patient safety issues.

Verbalisation or 'thinking aloud' is an important complementary interpersonal skill and will be more effective if you use clear language during your verbalisation.

Mastering this global consultation skill should therefore be a priority and it can be easily practised and improved with the exercises below.

Audio consultations

Using clear language is even *more* important during an audio consultation as you have no visual cues to help assess if a patient has understood you. Moreover, the quality of sound needs to be good and there may be barriers with strong accents that are amplified on the telephone.

Educational Activities

Activity 1: Use your patients!!

- Ask patients if the explanation you have just given is clear - if they say no or seem unsure, ask them why not?
- If you notice them looking down, losing eye contact during an explanation, check if you have confused them?
- During **audio consultations**, be aware that a silence or a hesitant response may mean that the patient has not understood.

Take care not to be too interrogatory though, as a patient may be embarrassed that they have not understood their doctor and may need coaxing to admit it.

Try and rerun the explanation, if time allows, so you can improve your skills and help the patient to understand.

Or make a note of the explanation you struggled with and practice a rerun with peers as Activity 5 below.

Activity 2: Try to use a patient's language in the consultation, for example if the patient says "I think this is down to stress, I've been feeling under a lot of pressure recently", use "You mentioned you put this problem down to stress, due to the pressure you have been under recently..." Practise in role played scenarios with your trainer. This works effectively for audio consultations too.

If you struggle to do this, look at the section on '*Identifies cues*' and '*Clarifies and explores cues*', and improve your use of patient cues.

Activity 3: Show your video/audio recording (with the patient's permission) to non-medical and medical colleagues - do they think your explanation is clear and not ambiguous? What phrases would they use?

Activity 4: Practise with friends and family, explaining conditions and management plans - ask them if they understood. You can download patient information leaflets from NHS patient.info. These leaflets use clear, simple language to describe conditions and their management.

Activity 5: Practise in your peer study groups. Come up with a list of common conditions and practise explaining the diagnosis of these conditions and the management. This may be particularly important if your first language is not English and also if you have changed career from a hospital specialty. Hospital doctors tend to use more medical jargon and technical language so you may have slipped into this habit. If English is not your first language, you may need to ask peers for phrases and words in English.

Audio consultations

Use the activities above to focus on improving your use of clear language during all tasks but in particular during clinical management.

In addition, try the following activity:

Use your patients to help with this part of the consultation. At the end of audio consultations ask patients two questions: a) *was there anything that they did not hear* and b) *was there anything they did not understand?*

The patient's ability to hear may be outside your control, but most problems can be at least alleviated if you concentrate on speaking more clearly and more slowly.

If an audio consultation patient tells you that they have heard you, but not understood you, then it is important to make sure you use simple and non-technical words and phrases. There are tips on how to do this in the material and activities above.

Related tasks

Practicing and developing the skill of '*Uses clear language*' will allow you to achieve the following tasks more effectively:

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

© Copyright 2021 Anne Hawkrige and David Molyneux HEENW. Not to be distributed or reproduced without prior permission of the authors.