



For you, your career, and your life

Vol. VI No. 3 Resident Assistance Program Newsletter September 2009

Essentials for Building Rapport Trust and Compliance Improve When You Connect

The ability to listen, a natural curiosity and empathy are among the essential qualities a doctor needs to establish rapport with patients, colleagues and staff.

When a doctor comes across as lacking any of these qualities, the consequences can be disruptive, distressing and potentially damaging to those who feel they have not been heard or treated with respect.

Karen J. Lazar, Ph.D. is a clinical health psychologist and psychoanalyst practicing in Livingston and Morristown, N.J. She has studied interactions between patients and doctors, how to facilitate patient compliance, and how to increase positive communication during medical visits. She relates this example of a doctor-patient interaction that went awry.

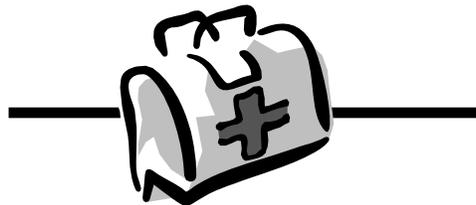
“A woman was suffering from an illness and was very upset about it. When she went to see her doctor — a specialist — for a repeat visit, she came away furious. She told me, ‘When I went in to talk to him, it made me cry. Yet he continued to talk as if I wasn’t crying, without addressing the fact that I was so visibly upset.’”

“The patient perceived the doctor’s behavior as callous,” says Lazar. “When that happens, it can

prevent the patient from forming a cooperative working alliance with the doctor, and might contribute to a patient’s non-compliance with treatment. Doctors need to look at the patient as a whole, and to acknowledge the impact the diagnosis and treatment are having on them. Physicians don’t need to be psychologists, but they do have to take a patient’s feelings about their illness into account.”

“Building rapport means really listening to what a patient is telling you, and understanding the emotional implications involved,” says Lazar. Doctors can elicit this important information by saying, ‘I’m interested in knowing what’s going on. Can you describe what’s happening?’”

“Doctors should listen to what a patient has to say, even if it seems trivial or silly,” Lazar says. “If a patient says something that doesn’t



“Tell me and I forget;
Show me and I remember;
Involve me and I understand.”

Author Unknown

It takes time to build rapport—time that we often think we can’t afford to spend. Yet a few essential steps can go a long way toward establishing trust with colleagues, patients, staff and other important people in your work and personal life.

When you run into challenges in any of your relationships, or you need someone to help you reassess, recover or set some realistic goals, your Resident Assistance Program is here for you. We’re your resource for improving your ability to excel as a physician and a leader.

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make sense, or you don’t agree with, let them finish—and then explore it with them. One way to do this is to say, ‘That’s kind of an interesting idea, let’s talk about it...’”

Listening, showing empathy and asking a patient to help you understand what’s going on can go a long way toward establishing trust and encouraging compliance.

“The time you spend with a patient and how you communicate with the patient and the family is important in terms of establishing a relationship based on trust and respect,” says Jill Sumfest, M.D., South Florida market medical officer for Humana.

“Communication allows the doctor to set realistic expectations for the patient in terms of their condition, treatment plan and outcomes.”

When patients are allowed to talk, they will often reveal clues about their health. A doctor who listens carefully can use this

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Money Matters

How Can I Better Manage My Short-Term Cash?

For the vast majority of people, it is essential to keep a portion of their assets in liquid form in order to meet monthly commitments.

For example, most families have to meet their mortgage or rent payments, grocery, utility, and transportation bills out of their monthly paychecks. There are a host of other expenses that arise from month to month, such as auto insurance, that help keep the pressure on the family cash flow.

If people are fortunate enough to have anything left over once all the expenses have been met, then they can worry about saving or investing for the future.

The paychecks that you deposit in your checking account, which seem to swiftly disappear as you pay monthly expenses, constitute a portion of your short-term cash. The money is no sooner in your bank account than it flows out again as payment for goods and services.

However, because the money that we use to meet our monthly expenses is so liquid, there is a tendency to simply look at it as a method of payment. We often leave more than we need in our checking accounts, gaining little or no interest until we need it for a future expense.

By actively managing the short-term cash that passes through your hands, you can provide a means of saving for the future. You can use this money to increase your net worth with little or no additional risk to your principal.

Find additional free online resources, including articles, calculators, newsletters, e-seminars and glossary of financial terms online at www.munizandassociates.com, or contact Julio C. Muniz, a Certified Financial Planner (CFP) and a Chartered Life Underwriter (CLU), 813-258-0033.

Building Rapport *continued*

conversation to enlist a patient's involvement in finding appropriate treatment.

"Approach a patient as if there are two experts there: A medical expert and someone who knows their body and their life," says Loren A. Olson, M.D. "Ask for collaboration. Think of yourself as a coach, not a dictator. The idea of 'I'm your doctor, I know what's best' is dead. Encourage patients to be agents of change involved in their own treatment."

Board Certified by the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology, Olson has been engaged in the clinical practice of psychiatry for over thirty years. He recommends the collaborative approach in working with staff and colleagues as well.

"Patients are served best with a collaborative team approach to treatment," says Olson. "All medical professionals are experts in something. Our skills overlap, but all need to be respected. Doctors are only one member of the team, and the team must include the patient as a member."

Dismissive behavior and ineffective communication can negatively affect staff and their ability to help you and patients. Treating front-line personnel in a condescending way can build a wall. Every person who interacts with the patient—receptionists, office managers, nurses, lab technicians and others—can provide you with important information about a patient.

"Salesmen (and reporters) know the importance of building a relationship with staff," Lazar notes. "They'll spend as much time with the support staff as with the doctor. As a result, when that friendly guy calls, his message will be put at the top of the pile."

"It's always good to have your staff on your side," Lazar continues. "If you make them dislike you, they may not be as cooperative when you need their help. Consider a situation with two doctors: One behaves dismissively towards staff, and the other engages them as part of the team. If both those doctors need information about a patient, you can pretty much guarantee staff will be more cooperative with the doctor who has demonstrated respect and appreciation for their knowledge and assistance."

More Rapport Tips

Dr. Jennifer Avegno, Director of Undergraduate Medical Education and Associate Residency Director in the LSUHSC Section of Emergency Medicine, offers additional tips for time-constrained doctors.

- Physicians must learn to take focused histories within the time constraints given. In the most hurried environments, spending two or three minutes totally focused on one patient can reap benefits and keep workups efficient and on target.
- If patients do not feel they have connected with their physician, they are unlikely to trust him/her and thus to comply with their instructions. Patients must feel that physicians understand their condition and have their best interests at heart.
- Simple techniques such as good eye contact, properly addressing the patient, sitting down, not conveying a rushed attitude, apologizing for long waits are easily done and make for improved communication. The niceties that physicians would use in conversation with friends and/or colleagues can easily be applied to patient encounters.