
Listening: A skill a doctor should have.

- By Aaditya Koshe, (Director, Anantavi Enterprises Pvt. Ltd.)

"Listen to the patient: He is telling you the diagnosis" Sir William told his fellows at the dawn of the 20th century. Research has shown repetitive evidence that doctors who listen, have better clinical outcomes.

Most of the satisfaction surveys have revealed that the most common dissatisfaction complaint that patients have is "My doctor doesn't listen to me". Another survey shows that doctors interrupt patients on an average at 18 seconds after they start talking. In this article we are going to look into the reason as to why good communication is important to build a good relationship with the patient. Following are the problems, why a doctor may not be a good communicator.

- Doctors have a tendency to get into their own thinking process after the patient has started to speak and think of the diagnosis for the patient thus leaving out important information that the patient is giving.
- Doctors tend to steer the conversation to familiar territory to them, depriving many patients of the chance to tell their whole story, including the important psychological factors.
- Experts say that most patients often withhold the real reason for their visit until they have already brought up two or three other items.
- The rush of doctors to see more patients in less time is seen as a major cause of doctors' failures to diagnose the true cause of ailment.
- Doctors are trained scientists; they live in terminologies and so have a tendency to use language which may sound alien to patients.
- Doctors sometimes, in rush, tend to forget to ask a basic question after their explanation "Do you have any questions?". This is probably because the doctors think they have covered all the points and the patient will ask questions if needed to.

Probably the most important part of the patient doctor communication is the question that can invite the patient to clear their fears, doubts and concerns. Following are a few techniques that can help doctors build better relationship with the patients.

- Recognize and reflect the patient's emotion, "You seem sad"
- Express sympathy for the patient " I understand why you would feel this way"

- Express your support to the patient's effort in coping with the ailment "You are doing an amazing job coping with your illness"
- Express your support to the patient" I am always there to help you"
- Express partnership and willingness to work together "Let's work together to solve these problems"

Mutual Satisfaction:

When doctors lack communication skills, their ability to gather information is compromised and they fail to engage with the patient in their own care. This leads to lack of patient self-care prolonging the ailment. They may also get wasteful treatment and tests done on themselves leading to further increase in cost of treatment. Better communication is not just for patient but also the doctor who gains a lot of satisfaction by treating the patient better.