

# The Essential Skills of Communication

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## Reflection

Please describe how your perceptions changed between videos 1 and 2. What influenced your change in perception? What are your key thoughts and takeaways from today?

## Changes in Perception

It is easy to form a bias that change our attitudes towards people or situations, but we must make every effort to not make judgements. This is possible with an open-minded approach to people and situations. Healthcare consumers have the right to know the identity of the individuals in-charge of their health. Therefore, introducing our name and designation should be the first step in order to establish a good rapport. Besides the verbal aspects of communication, keeping the tone of the voice confident, clear and friendly synchronized with appropriate eye contact and facial expressions are some of the key components of effective nonverbal communication. Getting into trouble is sometimes easy without even realizing how we got there. For example, direct and provocative statements and questioning such as "I suggest you calm down" or "I will not continue this conversation" can create conflicts. Strong words as these will quite likely steer the conversation in the wrong direction. We know that everyone wants to be acknowledged, heard, feel valued and appreciated. We can meet this respectful communication need by focussing on the interests of the other person. Active listening helps reassure the speaker. Techniques such as validating, reflecting, reframing, questioning, observation and some others can be used to our advantage.

Just like accidents, communication failures and conflicts do happen. We need to find a common ground of mutual interests and goals to resolve them. Doing so might be difficult as we may come across a variety of emotions. Hence, it is important

we isolate reason from emotion in our analysis of conflict and acknowledge what the other person might be feeling and state what we know if we were in the same situation.

## The Need for Effective Communication Strategies

We come across several situations in healthcare where the systems or the individuals who work for them fail patients and their family's expectations. Most of the lawsuits in healthcare could be avoided by effective communication. Hickson et al demonstrated that interpersonal factors trigger lawsuits and suggest a supportive relationship between the healthcare team and the patient to reduce the chance of being sued after an unexpected event. They found good collaboration and promoting teamwork as the keys to reducing error and increasing patient satisfaction [1].

We may feel content about many patients appreciating our efforts. But we should be more worried about every single negative patient experience. While we cannot control the storm, our survival depends on how well we adjust our sails. With this in mind, we need to prepare ourselves for possibilities of conflicting situations and difficult conversations with people from various background, knowledge and experience. Healthcare individuals who disrupt the emotional ecosystem increase liability for themselves and team members which requires remediation, training and practice[1].

## Conclusion

Communication is one of the key elements which decides the patient experience in healthcare. This needs a conscious awareness of its verbal and nonverbal aspects. Conflicts may arise, but should be resolved in a manner that acknowledges the positions and interests. Having an empathetic approach in our interactions and eliminating interpersonal trigger factors

will enhance the emotional ecosystem of the organization we work for.

**References**

1. Hickson, G. B., & Entman, S. S. (2008). Physician Practice Behavior and Litigation Risk: Evidence and Opportunity. *Clinical Obstetrics and Gynecology*, 51(4), 688–699.  
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