

# The Importance of Physician-Patient Communication

Workshop with Caroline Raphael (Registered Psychologist, BPsych, MAPS, FDRP)

***“Effective doctor-patient communication is a central clinical function in building therapeutic doctor-patient relationship, which is the heart and art of medicine” (1)***

Research has found positive communication between doctor and patient has the ability to improve patient adherence, increase positive treatment outcomes, decrease readmission rates, improve mortality rates, reduce medical error and improve doctor job satisfaction. (1)

It has been found doctors have a tendency to overestimate their communication skills, reporting themselves as excellent, whereas patients report feeling discontentment. Reports have found patients *dissatisfied* with their doctor’s communication style are more likely to make a formal complaint or initiate a malpractice complaint. (1)

Barriers to communication can be attributed to work and patient demands and unrealistic expectations; fear of litigation, of physical and verbal abuse and work and or patient anxiety and stress. Any one or more of these factors contribute to communication break downs and lead to the perception by patients that their physicians do not care.

***“The patient will never care how much you know, until they know how much you care.” (2)***

Health professionals who care do not have to become overwhelmed, burdened or develop complex PTSD, trying to keep up with the demands placed on them. In fact, the opposite is true!

**Keys to effective physician-patient communication include understanding the  
Power of Expression and the Art of Detachment**

**Power of Expression:** Expressing what we feel and know leads to feelings of satisfaction, expansion and joy. Curtailing or suppressing our expression leads to the opposite – dissatisfaction, compression and joylessness. Studies have shown that physician expression, focus and wholistic care towards patients is negatively impacted by the emotional and physical brutality of their medical training and working careers. The end result is the suppression of expression, empathy and care towards patients (1). Patients will often say how the news of their illness is delivered, expressed without empathy, holding or care, has a significant impact on how they process their diagnosis and how that influences their next steps and decisions. They often report feeling discouraged and disempowered, resulting in a power imbalance in the therapeutic relationship, leading to dissatisfaction for both physician and patient.

**Detachment:** Learning to detach, yet still being empathic and caring is possible. Detachment can sound clinical and even harsh; however, detaching is an integral part of being able to provide consistent, quality and ongoing care.

Detachment does not mean being cold, aloof or uncaring – in fact, detachment used as a way to remain objective enables us to be with another completely, hold them with deep care whilst not taking on their emotions or burdens but supporting a strong and positive therapeutic physician-patient relationship.

**This workshop will support you to understand:**

- the impact of positive and negative communication on the physician-patient relationship
- the impact of training, regulatory bodies and guidelines on expression and relationships with patients
- the importance of expression in all aspects of medical care and intervention
- how to express in a caring and supportive way whilst maintaining professionalism and guidelines
- how to support patients to be empowered and responsible in their healing process
- what true detachment is and how it supports physician care and client satisfaction and wellbeing

References: 1. Ha, J. F., & Longnecker, N. (2010). Doctor-patient communication: a review. *The Ochsner Journal*, 10(1), 38–43. 2. Tongue JR, Epps HR, Forese LL. Communication skills for patient-centered care: research-based, easily learned techniques for medical interviews that benefit orthopaedic surgeons and their patients. *J Bone Joint Surg Am*. 2005;87:652–658.

**Details:** Webinar: 2 to 4.30pm Friday 12<sup>th</sup> March

**Investment:** \$90.00 including GST

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