

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Skill in communicating with patients, peers and other members of the health care team have long been valued by specialists in Internal Medicine. Their importance is even more important as we traverse these times.

Goals

Resident competence in communicating with patients in:

- Obtaining the history
- Discussing the disease
- Discussing prognosis
- Explaining the diagnostic choices
- Explaining the therapeutic options
- Assessing the patient's compliance and progress

Resident competence in communicating with peers in:

- Sharing care of patients
- Obtaining and giving consultations
- Presenting cases for discussion or educational purposes

Resident competence in communicating with other members of the health care team:

- Nursing
- Therapists: respiratory, occupational, physical, speech, et cetera
- Social workers

Methods

Communication Skills Seminar

Each resident is expected to spend eight sessions (1 ¼ hour long) each year in this seminar. Objectives are to improve the resident's knowledge and skills in communicating with patients about a variety of issues. There is a major stress on dealing with difficult situations such as breaking bad news, asking about advance planning, DNR wishes et cetera.

- Noticing non-verbal communication: the patient's and one's own
- Use of venue to achieve communication goals
- Use of clarification
- Use of questions in educating patients
- Improving the data obtained by Hx
- Dealing with the non-compliant patient
- Provide insight into patient's viewpoints through role play
- Practice good communication techniques through role play

Improve the resident's knowledge about:

- Legal issues
- Medical ethical issues
- Humanism
- Professionalism

Other teaching venues

This very focused approach is supplemented by role modeling, observation of the individual resident when communicating and giving feedback (includes patient interactions as well as formal presentations) and conferences.

Suggested reading:

Billings & Stoeckle The Clinical Encounter 2nd edition 1999 Mosby

See Introduction for general patient characteristics and evaluation of residents and the teaching of the content. See table which follows for specific competencies to be attained during training.