



Communication with Patients

Specific issues for medical staff

Good communication is essential.

- Allows accurate clinical assessment
- Improves patient compliance
- Improves patient loyalty
- Minimises risk of complaint

Effective communication with patients not only enables you to take accurate notes but also helps the patient to understand what you are telling them. First impressions are vital not just with the Doctor but also with other staff and even through the appearance of the Practice. During the consultation listening carefully, showing empathy and an expression of understanding of the patient's concerns, will go a long way to build confidence in the patient. Below are various tips to help your Practice staff communicate with patients more effectively.

TIP 1 - Read the Patient's Body Language

Observe the patient's body language in the waiting room and consultation. This will give you an insight into what to expect in the consultation but also other areas of the patient's care that may need exploring.

TIP 2 - Avoid Barriers

Make sure the consultation room is comfortable from a patient's point of view. Keep the relationship with the patient as equal as possible. Try to break down barriers. For example, keep the desk uncluttered so there is a clear connection between the Doctor and patient. The desk is still there though for those who may not feel as comfortable.

TIP 3 - Listen Actively

Give patients time to explain or demure. Always let patients know you are listening by:

- Maintaining eye contact
- Being quiet when they are speaking
- Making sympathetic gestures or sounds as appropriate
- Avoiding crossing arms
- Avoiding leaning backwards or turning away
- Avoiding attending to interruptions

TIP 4 - Disclose all the Information

Always be honest and disclose all the information to the patient even if the information is not pleasant. This will build trust with the patient.

TIP 5 - Keep Information Relevant

Keep the information you give to the patient relevant and understandable. Ensure the patient comprehends the information and try not to confuse or overload them.

TIP 6 - Explain the Information

To make sure your information is fully understood it may be necessary to use the following:

- Language other than English
- Repetition of instructions
- Written information
- Diagrams
- Brochures or printouts

If you feel that a patient is unable to manage or grasp all the information in one consultation, recommend that they return for a follow up appointment to discuss the matter further.

TIP 7 - Always explain what you are doing

Especially in relation to physical or intimate examinations

(Refer Medical Practitioners Board of Victoria Bulletin vol 3 September 2007)

TIP 8 - Accentuate the Positives

Reassure the patient. Without giving false hopes. Wherever possible focus on the positive.

TIP 9 - Always offer Options

Patients appreciate hearing a range of options so they can choose what fits in with their lifestyle. They will also appreciate professional assistance in making choices.

TIP 10 Keep Good Records

Keep detailed records of all discussions and patient contacts, including telephone conversations. This minimises the possibility of disputes over what was or was not done or said on any particular occasion