



For you, your career, and your life

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Moments in Miscommunication: Vignettes Illustrate Valuable Lessons

It can happen to anyone. You make an assumption and it's off the mark. You miss important verbal or nonverbal signals because you haven't paid close enough attention. You don't ask enough questions to learn the whole story. Miscommunication can occur when you're dealing with patients, families, colleagues, staff and insurers. The stories that follow illustrate why it's so important for doctors to fine-tune their communication skills.

Eric M. Ossowski, M.D. is chief of family medicine at Phoenix Indian Medical Center in Phoenix, Arizona and the American Academy of Family Physicians' 2004 Family Physician of the Year. He shares what he's learned about taking time to understand his patients and their circumstances.

"When I first began doing well baby visits at some of Indian tribal clinics on reservations, moms would bring babies in with dirty, sticky heads," says Ossowski. "I thought the children had cradle cap, or that they weren't being kept clean. But as I came to

learn later, I had misinterpreted what I was seeing. What was happening is that babies' grandmothers were telling the moms to put mesquite sap on the soft spot because they believed it would keep evil spirits out until the skull closed. The moms were doing what was appropriate in both cultures — bringing their children in for a checkup, and protecting them according to their tradition. I learned to ask patients what might be appropriate treatment in their culture, to respect that and to tolerate it as long as it's not harmful."

Communicating with patients to learn what else is going on in their lives can be essential to providing treatment they're able to comply with, says Ossowski. "A patient with diabetes, for example, may have a tough time meeting the target. I'll wonder why they can't be more compliant. But when I ask the right questions I can understand where they're coming from and what the reality of their life situation is. Maybe they have an ill child, a pregnant teenager,

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The new RAP tagline, "For you, your career, and your life," emphasizes the purpose of your Resident Assistance Program. Far more than a hotline reserved for crisis situations, the program is also a ready resource to help you gain extra knowledge and skills for a successful career and fulfilling life.

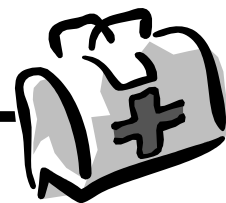
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Your Resident Assistance Program provides not only counseling but coaching to help you become a more successful physician. To learn more, call the Resident Assistance Program (RAP), 813-870-3344.

they're taking care of grandkids, or there are family problems with alcohol or drugs, and what I'm asking them to do is not practical. That may lead me to change the therapy I prescribe."

Sometimes physicians just

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At this very moment, there are people only you can reach...and differences only you can make.

-Mike Dooley



Money Matters

Fitting Disability Insurance Into Your Financial Strategy

Most of us are aware of the need for medical coverage, but we often neglect disability when determining our insurance needs. Disability insurance helps replace income lost because of an accident or illness. Few of us would have an adequate “war chest” for an extended battle with a loss of income.

Unfortunately, many of us will need disability income protection some time before we die. For people aged 45, two out of five will be disabled for more than 90 days before they reach age 65, according to the National Underwriter Company.

Disability at any age can disrupt income while medical expenses deplete your savings. Unless you have a battle plan, the effects of even a short-term disability can be financially and emotionally devastating.

Disability insurance provides a financial safety net. In the event you experience a disability, the benefits provided by disability insurance effectively replace a portion of your earned income. Disability coverage can prove to be invaluable. And in many cases, disability insurance should be considered before taking steps to achieve other financial goals.

Appropriate disability coverage depends on your unique situation. If you'd like help on choosing coverage that fits into your overall financial strategy, contact *Julio Muniz* or *Kim Fults* at **Muniz and Associates**, 813-258-0033.

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Moments in Miscommunication, *continued*

starting out do not have a balanced perspective on the importance of people skills, says consultant and author Vickie Alleman. “I once worked with a female physician who began seeing patients and then found that she had no cash coming through from insurance providers. Her office manager was at her wits’ end, because the managed care company was asking for more clinical information to pay claims — information only the doctor could provide. But the doctor hadn’t returned their phone calls — she didn’t understand why she should even talk to them. That’s an extreme example, but it illustrates the point that communication skills can make a difference on the business side of medicine too.”

Ned Claxton, M.D. directs the family practice residency program at Central Maine Medical Center. He encourages residents to observe more experienced doctors interacting with patients, and to seek feedback about their communication strengths and weaknesses. “Videotaping is useful, and so is asking patients for feedback. At the end of a patient interview, ask ‘How did I do my job? Is there anything I could explain better for you? Is there anything you have questions about?’ Some young doctors have an intuitive sense of how to relate. For others, it’s something they’ll learn over time.”

Standards of Conduct

Standards of conduct serve to establish ground rules for acceptable communications. These standards are a good idea for any business. Here are some examples for a medical practice:

- Physicians are expected to treat each other with respect. This means listening to each other’s viewpoints and responding appropriately, respecting the individual practice of each physician, and honoring the role each physician plays in the medical group.
- Physicians will behave as leaders and provide appropriate role modeling for employee behavior.
- Abusive, loud or angry behavior by any physician or employee will not be tolerated and will be grounds for termination. Problem solving, and honoring the role of each person in the medical practice as vital and important.
- Employees are expected to treat physicians and each other with respect. This means listening to opposing viewpoints, actively problem solving, and honoring the role of each person in the medical practice as vital and important.
- Patient care is our reason for existence. Every day we strive to provide the best communications with our patients by greeting everyone by name, thanking them for choosing us and asking if they are satisfied with our services.
- Our commitment to each other is to honor each individual for their unique contribution, respect the person, and communicate our concerns and appreciation each and every day.

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