



National Healthcare
Communication
Programme

BUILDING THE RELATIONSHIP

CALGARY-CAMBRIDGE GUIDE



Making conversations easier

Greeting and introductions

- **Greet the patient:** This should be warm yet professional. Avoid overfamiliarity by using formal titles initially *'Hello, it's Mr Jim Ryan isn't it?'* Consider non-verbal approaches like shaking hands.
- **Introduce yourself:** Give your name (first and family name), your role within the healthcare team and how the consultation is going to work *'I'm John Grace the physiotherapist and I work with Miss Collins the Hand Surgeon. I'm going to see you first and then Miss Collins will join us so she can help us plan your treatment'*.
- **Greet family or friends accompanying patient:** If there are family or friends with the patient, welcome them, check their names and relationship with the patient *'And who have you brought with you today?'* Check that the patient is happy for the family to be present during the consultation and tell them how you will organise the consultation. *'It's very helpful that you have come with your mother today. First I will talk with her and then I'll give you some time to tell me what your concerns are'*.
- **Check** how the patient prefers to be addressed.
- **Establish** that the patient can hear and understand you.
- **Attend** to the patient's physical comfort.
- **Tell the patient what you have done to prepare for the consultation:** *'I have read the letter from your GP' 'I have talked to Dr Murnane who saw you yesterday'*.

Non-verbal behaviour

- Be aware of your **facial expression** and maintain appropriate **eye contact**.
- **Demonstrate open body language**, for example, leaning forward demonstrates that you are listening and are interested, while crossing arms and legs may be viewed as a defensive posture.
- Pay attention to your **tone of voice** (warm, welcoming), and the **rate** and **volume** of your speech.
- When **taking notes** and **using the computer** explain to the patient what you are doing and why. Resist the temptation to talk and take notes at the same time.

Involve the patient and share your thinking

- **Explain your rationale regarding questions that may seem unrelated:** *'Now I just need to ask you some further questions which we ask all patients with your symptoms'*.

Empathy

- **Use empathy** to communicate understanding and appreciation of the patient's feelings or predicament. *'You've been having chest pains and you've been really worried about them because your father had similar symptoms just before he was diagnosed with serious heart problems – I can see why you are feeling like that'*.
- **Overtly acknowledge the patient's views and feelings:** *'So this made you really angry'*.
- **Provide support and build partnership with the patient:** Express concern and understanding. *'I can see why you are worried and our job will be to get these tests done as quickly as possible and then discuss'*.

Adapted From: Kurtz, S., Silverman, J., & Draper, J. (2005). Teaching and Learning Communication Skills in Medicine (2nd ed). Oxford: Radcliffe Publishing. Silverman, J., Kurtz, S., & Draper, J. (2013). Skills for Communicating With Patients (3rd ed). Oxford: Radcliffe Publishing.