Facilitating Skills: Delgado - Episode #2

In building relationships with patients, it is not enough to understand just the physical symptoms of a disorder. It is also important to understand how emotion affects, maintains, and even exacerbates a disease process. Additionally, a thorough understanding of a patients emotional well being can provide valuable information which may assist in dealing with non-compliance issues, cultural factors that impede treatment, and systems (e.g. family, social, and occupational) barriers. Eliciting and recognizing a patients’ emotion is an essential component of good patient-centered treatment. Collecting this information can be done easily and seamlessly in the context of a standard medical visit.

Useful Definitions

Important domains to assess and understand:

- Patients’ emotional experience: depression, anxiety, adjustment, fear, anger, and stress.
- Contributing factors of the patients’ emotional experience:
  - External factors: Work, family, interpersonal relationships, traumatic stress
  - Internal factors: Psychiatric disorders, developmental issues
- Patients’ recourses for handling distress
  - External recourses: social support, financial support, access to mental health care
  - Internal recourses: coping ability, maturity

Note: In addition to understanding a patient’s emotional experience, it is equally important to understand your own attitudes towards psychopathology.

Recommended Reading:

Smith, RC. Patient-Centered Interviewing: An Evidence-Based Method. 2nd ed. Philadelphia (PA): Lippincott Williams & Wilkins; 2002, Chapter 2
Discussion Questions

1) Just before the medical visit, Heather finds out from Nurse Vicki that Mr. Delgado is angry. The nurse also tells her that she (Heather) is likely the source of the anger.

- How do you think this knowledge made Heather feel?
- Do you think that this knowledge changed the way Heather dealt with Mr. Delgado’s anger at the beginning of the session (do you think she would have reacted differently if she had been “blind sided”)? If yes: What could Heather have done to remain calm?

2) After Heather came out of the exam room she presented the case Dr. Andrews.

- How accurate do you think Heather was in describing the emotional content of the interaction?
- How accurate do you think Heather was in describing the success of her intervention (rapidly listing off all the appropriate steps to diabetes management)?
- Do you think Heather tried to cast an overly positive light on her interaction with Mr. Delgado. If so, what do you think her motivation was?
- Think back to difficult patient encounters you have had. Have you ever been tempted to cast a positive light on encounters when presenting cases to an attending physician? If so, what was your motivation?

3) Dr. Andrews makes several attempts to impress upon Mr. Delgado the seriousness of diabetes.

- Do you think that Mr. Delgado understands the severity of the situation?
- What emotions could Mr. Delgado be feeling that would affect his ability to understand the severity of his condition?
- Do you think a more authoritarian style of communication would have changed this interaction and/or Mr. Delgado’s understanding of his condition?