

# MASTER EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IN AESTHETIC BUSINESS RELATIONSHIPS

Communication skills (or lack of communication skills) can have a large impact on the success of your business and personal life.

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Effective communication helps us better understand a person or situation and enables us to resolve differences, build trust and respect, and create environments where creative ideas, problem solving, and great relationships can flourish. As simple as communication seems, much of what we try to communicate to others—and what others try to communicate to us—gets misunderstood, which can cause conflict and frustration in personal and professional relationships. By learning effective communication skills, you can better connect with your patients, colleagues, and friends.

## COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES

In today's information age, we send, receive, and process huge numbers of messages every day. However, effective communication is not just about exchanging information; it is a process of understanding the emotions behind the information. Patients are more informed than ever, with the Internet providing easy access to information on every possible treatment option available. Consumers have been influenced by the images they see in magazines and on TV. Today, media plays that same strong role, with the addition of social media as a heavy influencer. In fact, a recent study conducted by the American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery (AAFPRS) found that 57 percent of aesthetic patients go online to get information about plastic surgery. In addition, 31 percent of physicians reported an increase in requests for surgery as a result of social media photo sharing.

The aesthetic patient differs from the traditional medical patient. Due to the pressure of keeping up with friends and family on a daily basis, consumers are more aware than ever of

how they look...and more anxious than ever to change those looks. They often show up with photos of celebrities or websites, expecting outcomes to be comparable. As this consumer-patient presents to a physician for a cosmetic consultation, it is more important than ever for the physician to understand this patient is seeking expertise and knowledge of the various treatment options, the past results and outcomes achieved, and the number of procedures the doctor has performed.

Patients are now more educated upon arrival, putting doctors in the position of correcting misconceptions and advising changes to a patient's decisions. All of this easy access to information has put aesthetic doctors in a precarious position. Often, despite a physician's strong recommendations, a patient insists on a treatment that might not be suitable. This poses an ethical dilemma for many physicians, who feel obligated by their position to strongly discourage the treatment. Advising against a neurotoxin treatment for a very young patient, for instance, could alienate that patient and lead him or her to seek the treatment from another physician.

## PHYSICIANS IN AESTHETICS ARE BOUND BY ETHICS

In every medical field, doctors have an ethical obligation to stay up-to-date on the latest treatments that can benefit patients. With an aesthetics practice, physicians are required also to be aware of the latest innovations in products and devices, whether those physicians offer them or not.

To address these challenges, it's important that aesthetic physicians choose patients who have reasonable expectations about the outcome of their chosen procedures.

## THE BIG IDEA

Effective communication combines a set of skills including: listening, thinking, speaking, and nonverbal communication with the person you're communicating with.

Informed consent is also an important part of any medical practice and can protect both you and the patient against unexpected results. To accomplish informed consent, follow these steps:

- As educated as many of today's patients are, it's important that a physician provide a thorough explanation of treatment options available to address the patient's specific aesthetic concerns.
- Patient and physician should have an open dialogue about the patient's aesthetic improvement goals, with the physician informing the patient about the outcome that can reasonably be expected.
- Prior to the procedure, it is the physician's responsibility to allot enough time with the patient to fully explain the risks and benefits of each chosen treatment.

It is imperative that the informed consent process not simply be a checklist serving as a legal protection. This is the chance for the physician and patient to have an open dialogue about each phase of the desired procedure. Yes, the informed consent documentation will provide an element of legal protection, but the first priority is always the patient.

As physicians speak to patients, it's important that any potential complications be mentioned. This is also the time to outline treatment regimens that will be required post-procedure. Patients entrust their care to a physician, making compliance part of a physician's responsibilities.

### EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION ADDRESSES CHALLENGES

Effective communication can improve relationships with your patients, in your professional and social situations. It enables you to communicate even difficult messages without creating conflict or destroying trust. Effective communication combines a set of skills including: listening, thinking, speaking, and nonverbal communication with the person you're communicating with.

**Attentive Listening.** Allows you to enter the reality of the other person and understand what their internal perspective is. Only when you do this are you able to communicate effectively by understanding what they are sharing with you, even if it is very different from your own perspective.

**TIP▶** Focus fully on the speaker. Make the patient feel fully heard and understood, which can help build a stronger

and more connected relationship to you and your practice. Attentive listening means not just understanding the words or the information being communicated, but also understanding how the speaker feels about what they're communicating.

**Confident Speaking.** When a physician speaks with confidence, it instills trust in the patient. To confidently answer any questions a patient may have, it's important that physicians stay up-to-date on the latest treatments available.

**TIP▶** Encourage input. Reduce patient anxiety by encouraging questions and seeking input from the patient to share in the decision-making process of their aesthetic treatment.

**Critical Thinking.** In communication, critical thinking involves actively listening to someone, taking time to process the information conveyed, and demonstrating a full understanding of what the other person said in your response. The ability to see an issue from the other person's perspective is crucial to good communication.

**TIP▶** Repeat back. Practice repeating back what the other person has said to demonstrate that you understand what has been said.



Good eye contact shows your comfort with the patient.

**Nonverbal Communication.** Wordless communication, or body language, includes facial expressions, body movement and gestures, eye contact, posture, the tone of your voice, and even your muscle tension and breathing. Body language is a large part of communication. Project confidence in your posture and avoid closing yourself off by crossing your arms over your chest. Be aware of the nonverbal messages you are sending to the patient by being pre-occupied.

**TIP▶** Use eye contact. Initiate and maintain eye contact with the patient. This shows that you are comfortable with the patient and that you have full confidence in the message you're conveying.



### **BENEFITS OF GOOD COMMUNICATION**

We need to make sure that our intentions, actions, and body language are all aligned to ensure there is a better chance that the message we send is the message received and

understood; this is the essence of effective communication. Effective communication skills have been correlated to such positive outcomes as adherence to treatment regimen, understanding of treatment risks, and may even reduce risk of medical malpractice claims. ■



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