Behavior Change: Understanding Your Patients’ Perspectives

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:
1. Demonstrate the ability to elicit the patient’s perspective of a problem/need.
2. Develop skills needed to provide a patient-centered and theoretically-grounded behavioral intervention to a patient to reduce health risk.
3. Explore the utilization of social media and other digital technologies by patients and health care providers in communication and access to health care information.

BACKGROUND:
One of the simultaneous joys and challenges of clinical medicine is that our patients are human beings; who, unlike computer simulations or lab animals, do not always do what we believe is the “right” thing to do. For some patients it may seem that creating a diagnostic or therapeutic plan is the “easy” part: getting the patient to follow it is the greater task. Many of the “obstacles” towards good health – non-compliance with medications, substance use, lack of flossing, or even a child’s persistent sucking his thumb -- are routed in a persistent behavior that, if changed, would have great benefit. The first (and perhaps natural) inclination for most of us when faced with a patient who has a behavior that we believe needs to be changed is to become paternalistic, delivering stern lectures rich with facts and anecdotes. We become like parents to disobedient children.

However, we are not our patients’ parents. Motivating behavior change is a complex skill, integrating medical knowledge and patient communication. A good motivational interview is about balancing the three communications styles of guiding, directing, and following. It requires active listening, and empathetic reflection. It means being a coach who can motivate his/her team to success as well as an instructor who can provide clear understandable instructions. In this session we will learn core principles of motivational interviewing and practice this important skill.

REQUIRED READING:

1 And even if we were, this is not a guaranteed strategy… how often did it work for you as a child?
OPTIONAL READINGS:


ASSIGNMENT:

During our PDC session we will learn how to change behavior using a role-play. One of your colleagues will use the techniques we will teach to try to get “you” to change “your behavior. In order to do this you need to have a “role” to play. Our assignment for this month will help prepare for this:

Interview a patient who you think needs to change his/her behavior to improve his/her health. Do not assume that the patient is motivated or ready to make any changes, but rather assess the patient's readiness to change. The patient may be thinking about changing the behavior, or already trying to change the behavior, or may not be thinking about this at all. You may consider any health-related behaviors, such as smoking, physical inactivity, consuming diets high in fat or sugar, or aspects of self care (such as medication adherence, following fingersticks, or weighing oneself daily).

Talk with the patient for 10-20 minutes about this behavior and her/his attempts to change it. Your goal in this interview is to gather information; you should avoid trying to promote behavior change. This will be difficult for most of you, and please keep this in mind throughout the interview. Again: you’re gathering information in order to understand your patient’s perspective; you are not trying to get her/him to change.

In particular, try to elicit from the patient her/his thoughts about:

1. What is positive about NOT changing the behavior (i.e. what is good about staying the way they are)***
2. What is negative about changing the behavior
3. What is negative about NOT changing the behavior the behavior (i.e. what is bad about staying the way they are)
4. What is positive about changing the behavior ***

*** These may be the most difficult; try to stay with it, without judgment. It is important during this exercise to avoid confrontation, and to try to elicit the patient’s point of view about what the behavior represents in their life and about why changing it is difficult.

In this exercise, we are also interested in learning if and how our patients utilize digital resources in accessing health information and therapies. Add to your routine interview of your patient a few questions related to their use of social media and other digital resources around health information, beliefs and therapeutic interventions. Addended is an interview tool that you can use as a guide for introductory questions to start this dialogue with your patients.
After completing the interview, write a summary that describes:
1. The behavior
2. The patient’s perspective on the positive and negative aspects of changing it.
3. Your reaction to the interview

This should be submitted via emed no later than 7:00 AM Tuesday, October 8, 2013. If you have any trouble completing this assignment please contact Dr. Weingarten at jweingar@montefiore.org

During our session together on October 11th we will be discussing our findings about our collected patient populations’ use of social media in health care access, information and choices. Bring the results of your exploration about digital resources to our session.