

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION*

80% of communication is nonverbal.

Nonverbal communication has been demonstrated to be crucial in the clinical encounter.

When there is a mismatch between verbal and nonverbal communication, nonverbal is a truer indicator of the patient's state of mind.

Effects of Nonverbal communication: Patient satisfaction

Compliance

Treatment outcomes

Patients give strong messages about what they want, without necessarily expressing them verbally.

Time needed to explore patient's emotions is an average of 3 minutes.

Interview skills that predict accurate diagnosis of emotions are:

Active Listening

Eye contact and face-to-face interaction

Absence of interruptions

Eye contact— gaze direction of doctor affects patient disclosure; withdrawal conveys lack of interest; patient may not give key pieces of information critical to the clinical encounter.

Interrupting opening statement—average time before interruption is 18 seconds; only 23% of patients complete their statements. Patients usually take 60 seconds to complete if allowed to do so.

General Categories of Nonverbal Communication

Kinesics— facial expressions, body tension, gestures, touch, body position, angulations

Proxemics— spatial relationship and barriers include horizontal and vertical distances between people, angles of facing each other, e.g. face to face, shoulder to shoulder, as well as angles in-between. Barriers can be anatomic like crossed arms or legs, or structural like furniture or piles of charts or books.

Paralanguage—voice tone, rhythm, volume, emphasis, pitch, and rate of speech

Autonomic output and fluctuations— flushing, tearing, sweating, respiratory rate, sighs, pupillary size, dry mouth.

Tips for making nonverbal communication more effective

Self-aware and open

Understand the power of first impression

Assessing patients mood

Observe

Show respect

Listen actively

Be patience

Be curious

Be aware of body posture and eye contact

Try not to interrupt

Smile

Show Empathy

Consider Appearance and dress — patient survey showed 65% prefer clean white coat; 27% think sneakers or clogs inappropriate; negative responses to women wearing prominent ruffles, cleavage, or long dangling earrings.

Note regarding Cultural Sensitivity: some cultures have different norms regarding eye contact, proximity, personal touch, and posture.