

Interpersonal Communications Skills DC

During this Diagnostic Challenge, we've asked our clients to pay special attention to the individual communications skills exhibited by each student. This is not to make you feel awkward or nervous, but to provide you with one of your first real opportunities to see how your communication style impacts your ability to communicate with present and future clients. The following list of communication specifics have been given to our DC clients to help them provide clear, concrete feedback to you. We wanted you to see this list so that you would also be aware of the elements of communication that often go into a client's perception of his/her helping professional. We hope this helps you become aware of the many aspects of interpersonal communication that form the foundation of building rapport with your clients.

1. Bedside manner (overall presence in interactions with client).
2. Tone of voice
3. Choice of words (medical language versus clear, understandable language)
4. Facial gestures exhibited (non-verbal communication)
5. Eye contact
6. Posture (Do you appear comfortable or stiff?)
7. Zone of comfort
8. Negative body language or distracting behaviors
9. Listening skills
10. Professionalism (do you convey a professional impression through your conduct, dress, attitude).

In order to help yourself develop these all important skills for your future interactions with clients in clinics, and in your future work or practice settings, we suggest you use this list to rate yourself after each interaction with your client, and to write a brief (no more than one page) self evaluation of your communication and interpersonal skills. **This sheet should be kept as part of a communications training file** (along with these handouts) that you will do additional work on during your third year "Introduction to Clinics" course.

Helping Others Give You Feedback

Feedback from another person is important information about how your communication style affects others. Even if you disagree with the feedback, it's important to hear it clearly and understand it.

Feedback tells you how another person sees your actions and gives you the choice of trying to change behavior. People act on their perceptions of your actions; you may be coming across in unintended ways and not know it. There is probably nothing worse than being ineffective in ways that are clear to others but not clear or apparent to you. Feedback gives you information about your impact on others. Such knowledge is invaluable for your growth as a veterinarian. . People who are interested in enhancing their performance should do everything possible to make it easier for others to give them feedback.

Getting feedback is difficult. It makes most people apprehensive and uncomfortable. These following guidelines make it easier for others to give you useful feedback. Keep in mind that these guidelines are meant to be used for both positive and negative feedback. It's often as hard (or harder) for people to hear positive feedback as it is for them to hear negative feedback.

Guidelines for Receiving Feedback

1. **Solicit feedback in clear and specific areas.** It's always easier to give feedback in response to a question, such as "Could you let me know what you thought about how I handled giving you the difficult news about Skip?"
2. **Make it a point to understand the feedback; paraphrase major points; ask clarifying questions.** Active listening helps insure that real understanding has happened. Ask clarifying questions in order to understand the feedback. Doing so helps the giver know that you are indeed interested and trying hard to understand.
3. **Help the giver use the criteria for giving useful feedback.** For example, if the feedback is too general, ask "Could you give me a specific example of what you mean?"
4. **Avoid making it more difficult for the giver of feedback than it already is.** Reacting defensively or angrily, or arguing with negative feedback, or saying, "Oh, it was nothing, anyone could have done as well," in response to positive feedback are all ways of closing off input from our simulated clients.
5. **Don't ask for explanations.** This particular guideline is perhaps the most important, yet it's the one that most people have trouble following. It's natural to want an explanation for the immediate feedback you're receiving. Keep in mind that you are hearing one person's evaluation. Simply take in the information, and ask yourself if it fits any previous feedback you have received.

6. Show appreciation for the person's effort to give you feedback. Saying “thank you” or “I appreciate the effort you took to share that with me” is a clear message that you appreciate receiving feedback, whether or not you agree with it. This action invites feedback in the future. In some ways, feedback is like a gift, because one has to care enough to give it. If not reinforced, a client may not give the “gift” of feedback to future students.

7. Remember that feedback is based on one person's perceptions of another's actions, not universal truth. Keeping this in mind helps one be less defensive about feedback. Check with others to determine the presence of behavior patterns. If two or three people provide similar feedback, there may be a pattern reflected that needs to be considered.

These guidelines for receiving feedback provide you and our DC clients the foundation necessary to building trust in our joint exercises. They also provide you with a means of responding appropriately to future feedback, from instructors, clinical faculty, clients and staff. Other's perceptions of us are often all they see. It is important to understand how our interpersonal style impacts others, so that we can improve the way we present ourselves. Being a good communicator not only impacts how clients and others view you, it impacts client compliance, patient care, client trust, and ultimately, professional and financial success. Make use of communication exercises throughout the curriculum

The Bayer Animal Health Communication Project

The Art and Practice of Effective Veterinarian-Client Interaction

Veterinary-Client communications and interactions form the foundation of all good medical care. Research shows that many helping professionals rush through client or patient interviews in such a focused manner that they often miss or misunderstand the primary reason the client came for assistance. The Bayer Communication Project has done a great deal of study of successful and not-so-successful medical interactions and they have found that there are two different modes of approaching the clinical interview. The first is termed the “Find it/Fix it” model. In this mode, the clinician is completely focused on obtaining the details that will allow her/him to discover the medical problem and come up with a diagnosis and treatment plan. Although this is important, such an approach often leaves the client feeling disconnected, disregarded and discounted in the process. Since it is the client who will either veto or support your treatment plan, it is imperative that the veterinarian make an effort to connect with the client and truly listen to what he has to say. In the second model, represented by “4 E’s: Engage, empathize, educate and enlist”, the veterinarian is reminded to focus on the vet-client interaction as well as the diagnosis. Keeping this model in mind will guide you through successful client interactions.

Bayer Communication Model:

Open the Visit:

- Introduce yourself, and welcome client and patient
- Shake hands; maintain eye contact
- Express warmth in voice and body language

Engage the Client:

- Express interest in the client as a person, as well as caretaker of the animal
- Don’t interrupt the opening statement
- Probe the client’s story with gentle, open-ended questions
(I.e.: Tell me about...What happened next...Describe...I’m curious about...)
- Find out all complaints (research shows vets often stop at the first one or two)
- Negotiate an agenda before exploring problems (I.e.: So, what were you hoping we’d accomplish today?)
- Elicit the client’s story (What is going on with this client and this animal?)
- Using the “funnel” technique of guiding a client interview is often helpful to accomplish these elements...
 - First, begin with open ended questions to get a broad view of the client’s needs.
 - As you go, translate, summarize and reflect back to inform your understanding of what the client is attempting to convey
 - Close ended questions (use these to get specific answers once you have a good, general outline of the problems. (Has this been going on long? Does he eat? Is he lethargic?)

Empathize with the client:

- Attend to body language and demeanor (You look really worried.)
- Legitimize ideas and feelings (It’s hard when there is no one solution, isn’t it?)
- Use reflective listening to summarize your understanding of the client’s story

- Respect coping efforts (I think anyone who loves their pet as much as you do would have responded in much the same way)
- Reflect that you “get” the client’s meaning with appropriate non-verbal expression
- Remain open and non-judgmental

Educate the client:

- Assess current knowledge
- Encourage client to ask questions
- Use clear language. Watch for non-verbal cues that the client is confused.
- Explain what it is you’re thinking, doing and requesting in terms the client can understand. Don’t assume the client knows what you mean. Check it out!

Enlist the client as a partner

- Encourage the client to share thoughts and ideas about the animal’s diagnosis
- Elicit the client’s expectations (What were you hoping for today?)
- Elicit the client’s preferences (Tell me what you’d like to see happen.)
- Agree on the problem and negotiate an acceptable treatment plan when possible
- Individualized care plan fit to the client’s needs (I know how difficult it is to give Sadie pills, so I am giving you this medicine in a liquid form.)
- Agree what to do if a problem should arise. (Let me know if you have any difficulties changing these bandages, or if you notice any redness around the incision.)

Close the Visit:

- Anticipate and forecast the end of the visit (We’ve only got a couple more minutes, Mr. Smith. Do you have any additional questions?)
- Summarize and review next steps (Why don’t we spend a few moments and review what we’ve discussed.)
- Express support and partnership
- Thank your client for working with you and for being a caring, concerned owner