

Avoids repetition

Green – Listens carefully to the patient, retains information about the patient, and does not repeat questions

Red – Fails to listen carefully, does not retain information about the patient, frequently repeats questions

Green – Progresses through the consultation without repeating consultation tasks that have already been performed

Red – Progresses through the consultation in an erratic way, may repeat previous tasks

About this global skill

Repetition of questions can really damage the consultation.

- It signals to the patient that you are not listening to the patient - which in turn signifies a lack of interest, concentration or respect.
- It also wastes time, irritates the patient (which makes them less likely to answer future questions helpfully)
- It prevents you from building up an accurate picture of the patient's problem.

What are the reasons for repeating questions? Here are some possibilities:

- You are thinking of the next question to ask, and therefore do not fully register the patient's response.
- Your concentration is impaired, and this causes disorganised questioning.
- Your initial question is badly phrased, and the patient does not fully understand what you are asking
- You are puzzled by the patient's reply but fail to explore this at the time.
- You are tempted to go over previous material when you do not know what to do next.

Sometimes trainees repeat whole sections of the consultation, if they are not completely confident that they have adequately tackled previous parts of the consultation. For example, after discussing the diagnosis some trainees say: - *"I'd just like to ask you a few more questions"*.

Audio consultations

It is particularly easy to repeat questions in audio consultations, where the level of concentrations needed is higher, and where you are less aware of non-verbal cues which alert you to the fact that the patient may be frustrated by this repetition. Sometimes, however, you may need to repeat a question. For example, if you cannot hear a patient response due to a poor line, or when something is so important that you have to repeat the question in order to clarify a piece of information. In such situations, make it clear to the patient *why* it is necessary to repeat the question.

Educational activities

Activity 1: Video several of your consultations and review them. On a piece of paper, write down every question you ask in each consultation. You will end up with a list of questions. Now review your list - how many times

have you repeated a question? Ask yourself why you have repeated questions? Did you not hear the answer the first time? Did you not understand the answer the first time? Were you thinking ahead of the next thing to ask? Were you just filling in a hiatus in the consultation?

Activity 2: Now repeat the process and try to completely eliminate all repetition of questions. You will need to listen carefully to the patient and explore any replies that you do not fully understand. Repeat the process in (1) of making a list of all questions and checking for repetition.

Audio consultations

Review several of your audio consultations. Do you repeat questions? If so, is there something about consulting via audio that causes you to repeat yourself. Do you think that the problem of repetition is more likely in face-to-face consultations, or in audio consultations? Why? Are there any techniques available to avoid repetition in audio consultations?

Do you always explain to the patient why there is repetition?

Reflective exercises

Exercise 1: Can you think of any situation where repetition may improve the consultation?

Exercise 2: What about the patient? What does it mean when *patients* repeat information? What should you do if a patient seems to repeat certain pieces of information, or repeatedly asks the same question?

Related tasks

Practicing and developing the skill of '*Avoids repetition*' will allow you to achieve the following tasks more effectively:

- Opens consultation and explores problem
- Discovers patient's psycho-social context
- Identifies cues
- Discovers patient's ICE

© Copyright 2021 Anne Hawkrige and David Molyneux HEENW. Not to be distributed or reproduced without prior permission of the authors.