Time to Talk

How can we communicate effectively in a challenging clinical environment?
Aims of the session

1. To gain an understanding of 'Achieving Good Medical Practice' (GMC, MSC), in particular Domain 3: Communication, Partnership & Teamwork

2. To develop communication skills by introducing common situations that medical students may encounter

3. To understand how effective communication can positively change the outcomes of challenging scenarios for medical students
HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF THIS SESSION

1. Optimise environment
2. Engage
3. Reflect
Domain 1: Knowledge, Skills & Performance

Domain 2: Safety & Quality

Domain 3: Communication, Partnership & Teamwork

- Communicate effectively, and support patients to make decisions
- Work collaboratively with colleagues to maintain / improve patient care
- Teaching, training, supporting & assessing
- Continuity & coordination of care
- Establish & maintain partnership with patients
- Maintain patient confidentiality
- Making a conscientious objection

Domain 4: Maintaining Trust
Have you ever felt like you don't know what to say in a clinical environment...

To patients?

To relatives?

To doctors?

To peers?

To nurses?

To others HCPs?
Let's try a case...
Dr Brown, one of your clinical teaching fellows this year, has just delivered a session on the causes of right upper quadrant pain. This is something that you have always struggled with, so you were really looking forward to this.

However, after the session has finished, you still feel as confused as you were to start with - you don't think that the session was pitched at the right level, or that the delivery was very clear. In the corridor, just before lunch, Dr Brown stops you and asks how you found her session.

What would you say?
AWKWARD?
How did you approach this situation?

- Say that the teaching session was great and that you really enjoyed it?

- Not really answer the question and awkwardly pause?

- Say it was bad and you got nothing from it?
What to do?

**Positive** - what elements did you find worked well?

**Constructive** - what do you think could be improved?

For example...
- Slides
- Delivery
- Content
- Tailored to audience
- Interactive

**Positive** - what elements did you find worked well?
"Thank you so much for the effort you put into this session. I thought that the slides were concise and easy to read. One thing I would suggest would be to break down the content into bite-sized chunks so it is easier to follow, and include some SBA questions - I think this would be really beneficial to test our understanding. However, I really liked your anatomy drawings, they were really helpful! Thank you again."
Feedback is essential to personal and academic development. But if it is not honest and open, neither yourself nor the teacher benefits. They cannot make appropriate improvements to improve the quality of their sessions, and therefore you (and future cohorts) may not progress as quickly with learning.

"As a medical student, you’ll be asked to give feedback on the quality of your placements and teaching... you must be fair, constructive and professional in your feedback and make comments based on your own experience. You should try to highlight areas of good practice as well as identifying areas where improvements could be made."

_domain: 31 'Achieving Good Medical Practice' - GMC, MSC_
CASE 2 - PPE Predicament

Annie is a 83 year-old lady with Alzheimer’s Disease. She is admitted to the ward during the Covid-19 pandemic with a urinary tract infection. You, a medical student on the ward, decide to go and have a chat to her, not forgetting to wear the appropriate PPE.

However, whilst taking the history, Annie becomes quite distressed and points at your mask in confusion.

What could be the reasons for this?
Annabelle

She can't hear you.

She doesn't understand why you're wearing a mask.

She thinks you have COVID-19.

She is in pain.

Sight problems.

Delirium.

Other.
It could be any of these reasons, or none of them. You won't know, unless you...

COMMUNICATE
What wasn't so great about this encounter?
Not introducing themselves, or checking patient's details

Closed body language

Not giving clear explanation

Ignoring patient concerns, and abrupt manner

Limited eye contact, and focused on writing
Disclaimer: Appropriate PPE including gloves and gowns would be worn in a real-life clinical environment
Pseudonym has been used for confidentiality purposes
What about now?

Clearly asking what is wrong - is she alright? Why is she pointing at the mask?

Open body language & non-verbal communication, including visual aids

Clear explanation of current situation and why you are wearing a mask

Clear delivery, speaking slightly louder and using easy to understand language due to added barrier of the mask and cognitive difficulties of the patient

Getting senior advice i.e. asking doctor to explain management in further detail

Could ask patient to repeat back, to check understanding
Not everyone has the same communication needs - it is important to tailor your approach to the patient, in order to get across all the information, and address their needs and wants. By using simple measures of adaptation, you can optimise your communication for that individual and increase satisfaction for both the patient and yourself.

"Take into account the patient's language and communication needs and other potential barriers to effective communication (for example, pain or anxiety) and ask for support to help you communicate effectively if necessary"
CASE 3 - Reasoning with a Relative

You are a medical student on the haematology ward, and you have been asked by the doctor to take a collateral history via telephone from the daughter (Susan) of a currently admitted patient.

Have a listen to part of the phone call...

What are the difficulties in this scenario?
What difficulties / barriers can you think of?
What are the difficulties in this scenario?
How would you approach an agitated relative?

- Explain why procedures have changed on the ward, and how this is important for patient safety.
- Find out why exactly she is frustrated - acknowledge and appreciate that Susan is worried for her father, and that she is understandably frustrated at not being able to see him.
- Ask Susan if there is anything else we could do to improve the situation e.g. arranging regular phone calls with her dad, ask the doctor if it is possible to regularly update Susan on her dad's condition (with Mr Mitchell's permission).
Take-home message:

Eliciting the concerns of patients & relatives early is vital to ensure that your communication is appropriate and personalised

As a medical student, when a patient or relative is becoming agitated, it is important to stay calm and clearly ascertain the reasons behind their emotions, so that you can attempt to resolve the situation. Make sure to acknowledge their feelings, give clear explanations for your actions and offer alternative methods if applicable. Failing this, don't hesitate to communicate with other members of the MDT for advice and help.

"Be polite and considerate to anyone close to the patient, such as relatives, carers and friends at all times – not just during a consultation."

Domain 3: 44 'Achieving Good Medical Practice' - GMC, MSC
'Achieving Good Medical Practice' Professionalism Guidance

And its direct relevance to medical students

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<th>Domain 1: Knowledge, Skills &amp; Performance</th>
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<td>Communicate your competencies</td>
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<td>As a student, you will talk to so many different patients, and will need to adapt appropriately</td>
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<th>Domain 2: Safety &amp; Quality</th>
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<td>Ask if there is any way you can help whilst in a clinical environment</td>
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<td>Communicate what you would like to gain from a session</td>
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As a student, you will talk to so many different patients, and will need to adapt appropriately.
1. Honest & open communication, no matter how difficult, is key.

2. When faced with barriers, carefully think about how you can adapt your communication to overcome these.

3. Eliciting the concerns of patients & relatives early is vital to ensure that your communication is appropriate and personalised.
Resources & Further Reading

'Good Medical Practice' - GMC

'Achieving Good Medical Practice: Guidance for medical students' - GMC, MSC

'Good Medical Practice in Action' - GMC

Your Medical School’s resources on Communication
Thank you for watching and engaging with this presentation. Communication has never been more important than it is now. We hope you take these key messages away with you, and apply them to your clinical placements. We also encourage you to complete the post-session summary sheet, to consolidate the key points highlighted today.