COMPASSIONATE CARE

Listening to your patient takes time, but it’s worth it

It can seem impossible to find the time to talk to patients. But those who feel listened to are more likely to take an active role in their own care.

By Mandy Day-Calder

I will never forget my first visit to a chiropractor. Not only was it the first step to regaining strength and movement in my back, it was the most I have ever felt ‘heard’ by a healthcare professional.

As well as gathering clinical information, my chiropractor took the time to find out what mattered to me and what I wanted out of my treatment.

One of the questions he asked me was: ‘What are you not doing now that you want to get back to?’ By doing this, he won my trust, and I felt hopeful and motivated again.

Working on a busy ward or in the community naturally presents different challenges to working in a private clinic. Resources are scarce and time is of the essence. Coping with competing demands means you may be in the habit of doing everything – including talking to patients and their relatives – in a rush.

Listening is a skill that requires concentration and focus. As Stephen Covey, author of The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, said: ‘Most people do not listen with the intent to understand, they listen with the intent to reply.’

If you reflect on recent situations when you haven’t felt listened to, either at work or in your private life, how did you feel? Most likely you were left feeling frustrated, lost or angry. It is the same for patients who feel rushed or unheard.

‘Give patients time. Sometimes they will offer information you were not expecting’

Patients who feel listened to are more likely to relax and engage in conversation, which can help them take a more active role in their own healthcare.

Although you cannot spend endless time with each patient, you may gain more from slowing down and really listening to what your patients are saying – or not saying.

A few changes to how you approach your interactions
Taking time to listen is worth it

- can often improve the dynamics. Here are some tips:
  - Be inquisitive: use open questions and give patients time to answer. Sometimes they may offer information you weren’t expecting.
  - Be flexible: the same approach won’t suit everyone. Avoid medical jargon, and use language appropriate to your patient’s age and culture.
  - Empower your patients: your role is to offer guidance and information, and to provide space for patients to decide what is best for them.
  - Watch your body language: are your words implying that you are interested but your body is saying you are in a hurry?
  - Be mindful: you may have lots to do, but try to stay focused on the present and the person you are talking to.
  - Be honest: sometimes you may need to cut a conversation short. If this happens, stay calm and explain why.
  - Maintain energy levels: the more you look after yourself the more you can be there for others.

Mandy Day-Calder is a freelance writer and life/health coach.

Seize the opportunities

From midwifery student to matron, Rukeya Miah has benefited from working at a trust that actively supports and promotes staff

By Lynne Pearce

Since Rukeya Miah joined Bradford Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust 16 years ago, she has progressed from midwifery student to matron.

‘As a clinician, you need a hunger to develop,’ she says. ‘How you reach your end goal is then down to the organisation and you, working in partnership.’

After qualifying as an adult registered nurse in 1994, Ms Miah took a shortened midwifery programme at Bradford, then decided to stay with the trust.

‘It was the best decision I made,’ she says. ‘The opportunities I’ve had here since then have been instrumental in my development as a midwife, clinician and leader.’

After rotating through various midwifery roles, Ms Miah did an advanced practice course and a master’s programme, gaining promotion to a practice development post at band 7.

She also completed a supervisory midwifery course, now known as professional midwifery advocates, becoming one of just a handful of midwives locally from a black and minority ethnic (BME) background to do so.

After completing an NHS leadership programme, she took up a band 8a post as matron in renal medicine, diabetes and infectious diseases. This enabled her to develop her leadership potential while continuing to be a