TIME AND TALK:
STRUCTURING PATIENT-CENTERED COMMUNICATION

Workshop participants should be given sufficient time for reflection and feedback. This will create a more positive and constructive experience that will help them develop skills and confidence.

Reflection occurs at individual and group levels. At the end of a role-play scenario, you should first ask the person playing the clinician how he/she felt it went. Then ask the person playing the patient what it felt like to be interviewed. Finally, ask the group for their comments based on the interview task.

During the feedback session, focus the discussion on the agenda set by the person playing the clinician. The discussion can also include new topics that might have come up during the role-play. As they decon-struct the interview process and examine the challenges and the skills they applied to deal with them, participants become able to reflect on their own practice.

Below is some guidance on how to structure the reflection and feedback process and give good feedback.

FEEDBACK PRINCIPLES

Feedback should be

Non-judgmental: Constructive feedback will ensure that all participants benefit from the session.

Honest and positive: It is important to tell participants about situations in which they can improve their communication skills. Give encouraging, positive feedback and praise when appropriate. Having a sense of humor often helps when giving less positive feedback.

Relevant: Feedback should be aligned with the aims and objectives of the teaching session, the competency level of the participants, and their individual agendas. It should complement other feedback already given and avoid repeating points already made.

Descriptive: Feedback should refer to what actually happened in the role-play. It is not enough to say "well done". The group should com-ment on the words the role-players used, their non-verbal behavior, and the effects of their actions on the direction of the consultation.

Detailed: General statements should be avoided. Feedback should be precise. It should describe and detail what the participant said and did.

Formative: The feedback given (where it indicates room for improve-ment) should provide suggestions for skills, techniques or approaches that the participant can try.

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EXAMPLES OF DESCRIPTIVE, NON-JUDGMENTAL AND SPECIFIC
FEEDBACK PHRASES:

- "I noticed that when you looked down at your paper to take notes,
  the patient's voice went quieter and then she stopped talking."

- "I noticed that you often said 'right okay', immediately after the
  patient said something. This seemed like an automatic, habitual
  response, which could make patients feel that you are not listening
  to them. If you vary your responses, and sometimes simply say
  nothing, you will be able to convey different levels of encouragement
  and demonstrate your empathy to patients, as well as give them the
  chance to say more."

- "The use of silence in the opening of the consultation was effective.
  You seemed to be waiting for the patient to respond, and giving him
  the chance to say more. The way you held yourself still, and with
  your hands relaxed on your lap, seemed to encourage the patient to
  speak and showed him that he had your full attention."

HOW TO ORGANIZE THE FEEDBACK PROCESS

Start with the learner's agenda: Ask what problems the learner experienced and what help he would like from the rest of the group.

Look at the outcomes learner and patient are trying to achieve: Thinking about where you are aiming and how you might get there encourages problem solving – effectiveness in communication is always dependent on what you are trying to achieve.

Encourage self-assessment and self-problem solving: Allow the learner space to make suggestions before members of the group share their ideas.

Involve the whole group in problem solving: Encourage the group to work together to generate solutions not only to help the learner, but also to help themselves in similar situations.

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HOW TO GIVE USEFUL FEEDBACK TO EACH OTHER

Use descriptive feedback to encourage a non-judgmental approach:
Descriptive feedback ensures that non-judgmental and specific comments are made and prevents vague generalization.

Provide balanced feedback: Encourage all group members to provide balanced feedback on what worked well and what didn't work so well, thus supporting each other and maximizing learning – we learn as much by analyzing why something works as why it doesn't.

Make offers and suggestions, generate alternatives: Make suggestions rather than prescriptive comments and reflect them back to the learner for consideration; think in terms of alternative approaches.

Be well-intentioned, valuing and supportive: It is the group's responsibility to be respectful and sensitive to each other.

HOW TO CREATE A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING AND DEVELOP KEY SKILLS

Rehearse suggestions: Role-play alternative phrasing and practice suggestions because learning any skill, observation, feedback and rehearsal are required to effect change.

Value the interview as new, raw material for the group: The interview provides raw material around which the whole group can explore communication problems and issues. Group members can learn as much as the learner being observed but ensure all group members take their turn in making and rehearsing suggestions.

Opportunistically, introduce theory, research evidence and wider discussion: Offer to introduce concepts, principles, research evidence and wider discussion at opportune moments to illuminate learning for the group as a whole.

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