Managing Challenging Conversations with Patients
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Disclosure Statement

No commercial disclosures pertain to this presentation.
Objectives

- Describe a scenario that providers label as "difficult" (20 min)
- Name patient, provider, and systemic factors that may play a role in challenging conversations (10 min)
- Describe useful skills for managing conflicts in challenging situations (20 min)
- Demonstrate how these skills can be used in common scenarios (40 min)
“Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.”

- Leo Tolstoy, Anna Karenina
Cases
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Factors that lead to challenging communication

Patient Factors

Provider Factors

Systemic Factors
Conflict resolution skills

- Recognize that you are in a conflict
- Check your own assumptions before acting
- Elicit patient’s perspective / role of cultural differences: Fears, Ideas, Function, Expectation
- Listen actively: Partnership, Empathy, Apology, Respect, Legitimation, Support
- Use principled negotiation
Conflict resolution skills

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Cone in the Box

Adapted from Tony Suchman, Penny Williamson
The Ladder of Inference

“We live in a world of self-generating beliefs which remain largely untested.”

We struggle to have productive dialogue because we feel that:

• Our beliefs are THE truth
• The truth is obvious
• Our beliefs are based on real data
• The data we select are the real data

Adapted from Chris Argyris, Peter Senge
Ladder of Inference

• Yet another example of how no one appreciates what I do.

• These patients have no idea how important the treatment is.

• He just wants to get high again.

• These patients are so entitled.

• He is yelling at the staff, and they are paging me frequently.

• He came in for antibiotics for osteomyelitis yesterday, but is threatening to leave AMA today.
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Listening Exercise

- Work in pairs

- 2 different roles for 3 minutes each:
  - Storyteller: speaks about a challenge in a work-based relationship: patient, colleague, supervisor
  - Listener: asks no questions and tells no stories: reflects speaker’s words, uses empathic statements
  - Suggested tools: nonverbals; “Sounds like ...”; “I’m hearing ...”; “I wonder ...”
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Principled Negotiation Skills

- Refrain from making things personal
- Focus on interests, not positions
  - Position: pt wants to leave AMA, you want pt to stay
  - Interests: the underlying reasons for these positions
- Highlight shared goals
- Develop options
- Use active listening skills to communicate your bottom line
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Exercise

- Goal: Demonstrate the effective use of conflict resolution skills in simulated cases
- Choose a challenging case; select a provider and a patient
- Group works on how to demonstrate use of skills, and enacts the case in front of the room after 15 minutes (2-3 min/case)
Take-homes, Evaluations