

## Principles of Communication



LIVERPOOL HEART AND CHEST HOSPITAL  
ENTRANCE

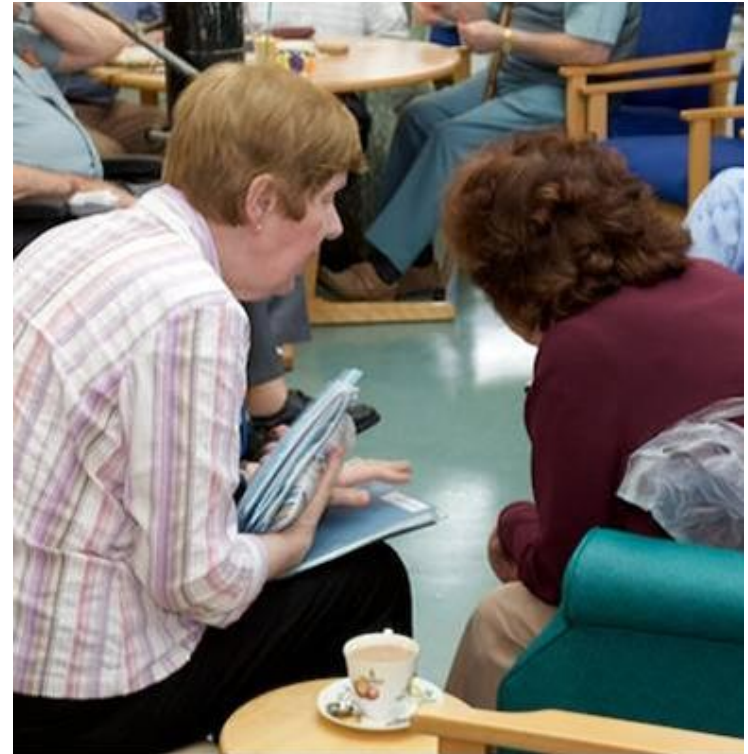
By the end of this session you will be able to:

- Define communication
- List factors that help good communication
- List factors that prevent good communication
- Describe why patients, families and staff sometimes block communication
- Discuss how good and poor communication might impact upon you and the people you are talking to

Communication is something that we all do on a daily basis, yet you may not think about what makes communication good or poor.

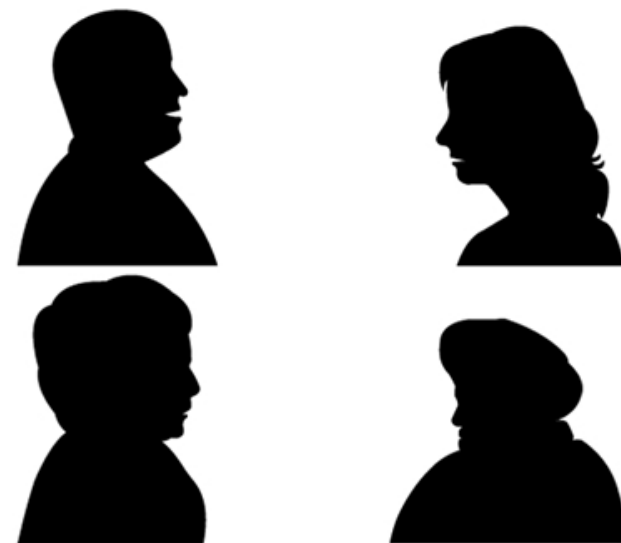
In this session you will look at some of the factors that can prevent or block good communication. You will also look at factors that can help to improve your communication skills.

Finally, you will be asked to reflect on your own communication.



Communication is a 'two way' process, involving the exchange of information between two or more individuals.

When you communicate, you perceive the other person's responses and react with your own thoughts and feelings. It is only by paying attention to the other person that you have any idea about what to say or do next. The way you speak and listen will send messages to anyone who is listening or observing.



**Image** Communication is the exchange of information between two or more individuals

Can you identify at least three ways in which people communicate with each other?

## **Feedback**

There are many different ways in which people communicate with each other. For example:

- Face-to-face
- Telephone
- Email
- Web cams
- Letters

Everyone will interpret things differently and your interpretation may be different to somebody else.

Think back to a time when you misinterpreted something that was communicated to you. What was the main reason for this misinterpretation and could this have been avoided? You may want to think about things such as tone of voice and facial expressions.

Think how these factors can influence the different ways in which we communicate.

People decide things about you within 10 seconds of meeting you. Their decision is based on your image, which is a combination of your appearance and behaviour. A smile of welcome and an introduction is therefore very important.

Which one of the images opposite do you think shows the best welcome?

Image 1



Image 2

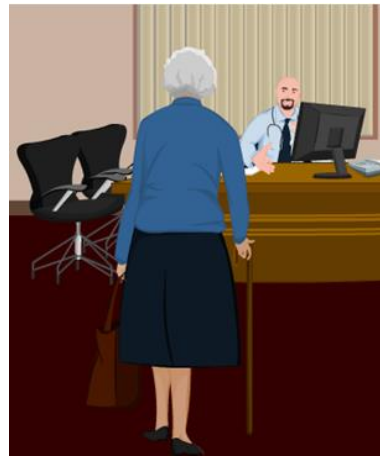


Image 3

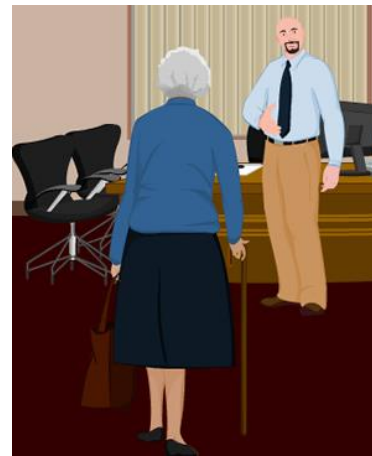
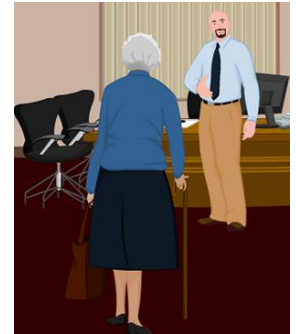


Image 4



## Feedback

- A. Incorrect.** Although the professional is standing up and is ready to shake the patient's hand, the chairs are on the opposite side of the table. The table is a physical barrier in communication, which can make the environment seem too formal.
- B. Incorrect.** Although the chairs are now placed correctly to one side, the professional remains seated.
- C. Correct.** The professional stands up in front of the table and is ready to shake the patient's hand. The seating is next to the professional without any physical barriers in between.
- D. Incorrect.** The professional remains seated and is looking away from the patient. There is no seating.



Words themselves have no meaning – people give meaning to words. People may give a different meaning to the same word, which may be dependent on their background, culture, gender or age. This is important to remember when communicating with patients in end of life care.

**Question:** What meanings might the following words have?

- Cool
- Heart
- Bad

**Answer:**

The image opposite demonstrates how the above three words can be used in different contexts.



**Image 2** The same word can have several meanings. You need to be aware when communicating with patients

## Language

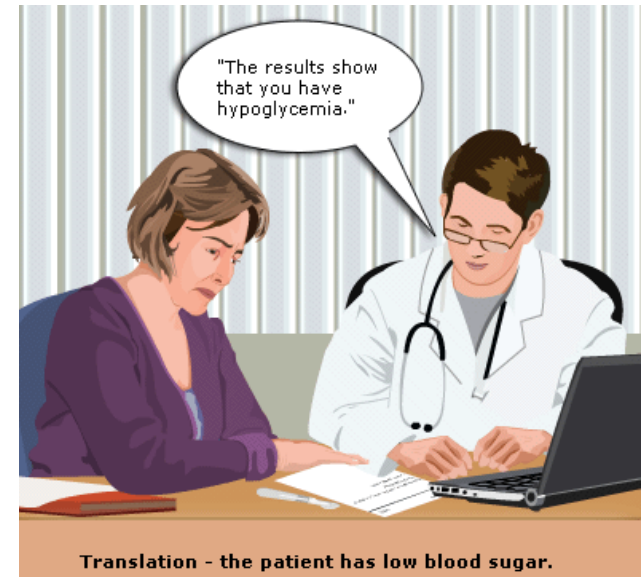
When communicating with patients in end of life care, it is important to speak in a language and at a level that the patient understands. Avoid using medical or technical jargon.

## Tone

The tone, pitch and pace of your voice can influence how others may interpret your dialogue.

## Repetition

Repetition is important to help people understand and remember the information that has been given to them. This can be extremely important when talking to patients at the end of life about their condition, diagnosis and treatment.



Avoid using medical jargon when communicating with patients

Non-verbal communication includes:

- Eye contact
- Posture
- Facial expressions
- Personal space



**Image 1** Your non-verbal communication can have a negative impact on communication

## Eye contact

Eye contact should be at an appropriate level - do not stare or divert the eyes away. Remember that in some cultures regular eye contact may be seen as offensive, particularly female to male eye contact.



**Image 2:** Eye contact should be at an appropriate level

## Posture

Posture is important when listening or talking. Leaning forward with eye contact would indicate active listening.



**Image 3:** Leaning forward with eye contact would indicate active listening

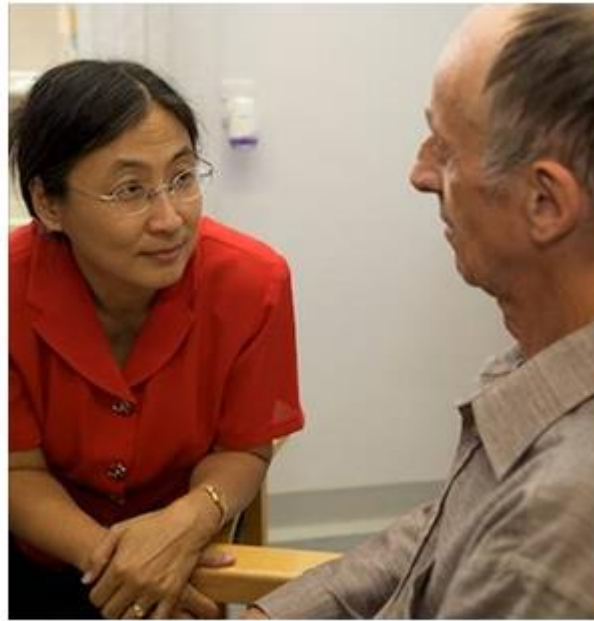
Facial expression - smiles demonstrate interest, but remember your expression needs to be consistent with what is being said.



**Image 4:** Your facial expressions are important

## Personal space

Personal space includes the use of touch. However, some people will not be comfortable with touch.



**Image 5:** How close is too close?

# The Importance of Listening

## Key Points

One of the best ways to communicate with someone is to stop talking and to listen to what they are saying.

Listening is more than just hearing what is being said - it involves an attempt to understand the meaning behind the words without interrupting or rehearsing how you will reply.

To allow patients the opportunity to talk freely, you need to get the setting right. Privacy and comfort are important. Avoid physical barriers between communication, such as desks, and try to sit at the same level to maintain eye contact.

Question: Review the image opposite. What barriers to communication are present?

Answer:

There is a lack of privacy due to another person being present in the room

The professional is not facing the patient and is seated in a way that prevents regular eye contact



Think how can you demonstrate to someone that you are actively listening to them?

Feedback

Some of the ways that you could show that you are listening are by:

- Nodding your head
- Maintaining eye contact
- Matching your facial expressions to what is being said
- Making encouraging comments
- Not interrupting
- Not talking about yourself

Remember, if a patient stops talking they may just be thinking about what to say. Silence allows people to gather their thoughts. Sometimes there isn't anything to say. Try to get comfortable with silence.

Some people need time before they feel comfortable in expressing their feelings, whereas others may show feelings of anger, fear, distress or worry. Some patients may pretend to be cheerful to protect the feelings of others. Some patients may also bottle up feelings because they feel too embarrassed or ashamed of not being able to cope.

However, studies have shown that bottling up feelings and not talking about fears makes a situation worse.

Talking about worries and getting things off your chest is a good way to relieve stress. You should try to encourage your patients to open up by asking questions like the ones shown opposite.

Don't worry if you do not have the answers. Just actively listening to your patients will be helpful.



**Image** Encourage your patients to open up to you

# Barriers that Block Communication Introduction

Effective communication is influenced by people and the environment.

**Question:** People, such as staff, patients and families, can block communication for many reasons. Why?

**Answer:** People can block communication due to:

- Language barriers
- Not knowing what to say
- Fear of breaking down or getting upset
- Fear of taking too much time
- Feeling like there is no point in talking if there are no answers
- Tiredness or illness
- Fear of dealing with strong emotions
- Not knowing enough
- Feeling like a burden
- Feeling frightened of saying the wrong thing

**Question:** How can the environment act as communication block?

**Answer:** The environment can act as a block due to:

- Lack of privacy
- Not enough time for discussion due to, for instance, others having booked the room
- Noise – may make it difficult to hear and be heard
- Comfort – i.e. too hot or too cold



**Image 1** Effective communication can be influenced by people

Bearing in mind what you have learnt, think back to a situation with a patient where you felt communication was good. Why do you think this was?

## **Feedback**

There is no right or wrong answer here. The purpose of this question is to introduce you to the importance of reflection.

Reflecting on your past experiences will help you to realise what your strengths are when communicating with patients in end of life care.

As well as realising what you are good at, it is also important that you realise where your weaknesses may lie so that you are aware of those areas that need to be improved.

- Everything you do and say communicates a message
- Communication, whether it be good or poor, has an impact on everyone
- Good communication skills will help build good relationships with patients, their families and your colleagues
- Good communication can help others feel heard, valued and part of the decision making process
- Bad communication confuses others, acts as a barrier to them speaking freely or asking questions, and leaves everybody feeling dissatisfied
- Bad communication may make you feel like you are not good at your job
- Good and effective communication in health and social care is vital