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Don't Get Sued: Five Communication Tips For Physicians

By Jennifer Viemont

Today's physician is busier than ever before. Managed care headaches, too many patients,

electronic medical records, and other emerging technology make some physicians feel that they simply don't have enough time to communicate with each patient. According to Dr. Peter Barnett, an internist and assistant professor at University of New Mexico, "the time you spend up-front frequently saves time later [in the form of] phones calls, questions and complaints."*

Improving communication with patients has clear benefits in reduced risk for malpractice suits, improved physician satisfaction, and better patient understanding of conditions and treatments leading to greater compliance. Medical schools are beginning to address communication in their curricula, but what about the physician who is far out of medical school? Here are five simple ways to start.

1. Put Down that File or Tablet PC!

Non verbal behavior often communicates things we have no intention of communicating. You may be able to fully attend to a patient while reviewing and making notations in their charts or on your computer, but you are communicating that what they are saying is not important enough to give your full attention. Make eye contact with the patient, be aware of how you are holding your body (uncross your arms, lean forward) and, most importantly, don't interrupt.

2. Be Human

My son was born premature and had some medical issues for the first few months of his life. We had an amazing pediatrician at the time. Though she had extensive medical knowledge, the reason we trusted her was primarily because she made herself so human to us. She decreased the power differential by telling us that she prayed about our son at night. When discussing decisions that needed to be made, she indicated which choice she would make if it were her child, she knew how to joke and keep things light when needed, and just through casual conversation during appointments we knew little things about her family and interests. Even when working with patients, she was a person first and then a doctor.

3. Show Compassion/Empathy

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Many people may think that being empathetic and compassionate are traits that can't be learned. I believe that most physicians have these traits or they would not have chosen their line of work. They often just need work with the skill of showing it. Actively listen when patients are talking to you. Increase your comfort with feeling words and expand your emotional vocabulary. Try to listen for what they may be feeling or think about what you may feel in a similar situation. Use the formula "I can understand why you would feel _____. Is there anything I can do to help with that?" You may actually be able to provide a solution be it literature, a different prescription, clarification, reassurance, or support.

4. Clarify

One common communication error physicians make is to talk at the patient, rather than discuss the situation with them. We understand that this may be the 30th case of the flu you've seen this week, but to the patient, it's unique. What may seem very clear and simple to you can be extremely confusing for

your most educated patients. After explaining something to a patient, ask for their understanding of the situation. Practice the same strategy yourself and summarize the patients concerns or questions that they present to you.

5. Increase Self-Awareness

Practice the skill of self-observation. Learn the strengths and weaknesses in your personality. Be aware of your style, habits, and tone. Note how you communicated after people responded positively and negatively to you. Ask a trusted friend, family member or professional advisor for an assessment of your verbal and non-verbal communication skills. By increasing your self-awareness you will be able to pinpoint the areas of communication you want to consciously improve.

Not surprisingly, physicians who lack effective communications in the workplace will often have issues in their personal lives, such as strained relationships with children, marital problems, divorce, and dating difficulties. Learning to communicate effectively can lead to dramatic improvements in one's quality of life from both a professional and a personal perspective. Incorporating these new skills consistently can be difficult and outside help is often useful.

*"Bedside Manner for the Modern World" Joanne Tetrault PHYSICIAN PRACTICE October 2005

Jennifer Viemont is a life coach and Licensed Clinical Social Worker who trains, consults with and coaches clients in her nationwide life coaching practice, Deliberate Living (

<http://www.deliberateliving.org/>

). Her practice specializes in working to improve relationships in the

lives of physicians and others.

Can Nevada Corporations Protect Your Assets?

By Yvonne Volante

Did you know that in the USA there are considerably more lawsuits than anywhere else? Here are a few interesting facts:

1. Nine out of ten lawsuits filed in the world are filed in the United States.
2. We have over 800,000 lawyers in the U.S. That is 4 times more than all other lawyers in the world.
3. If you own a business or are in a profession, you stand a one in three chance of being sued this year.

Is there any wonder, then, why so many lawsuits are filed? Ask yourself this question: how do many lawyers make money? Answer: by suing those of you who have something to lose.

So think about what you have to lose. Answer this question: do you have a home, stocks or bonds? How about mutual funds or an annuity? Maybe you won the state lottery or have a nice car or motor home? Or maybe grandma's nice inheritance. Whatever you may have, it's at risk if you get sued.

But lawyers aren't the only ones who can control your destiny.

Did you know that the powers of the Federal government have increased exponentially? This has resulted in the destruction and destruction of your financial privacy.

The best way to control this power grab by the attorneys and the government is to restore the privacy that was granted to you in the U.S. Bill of Rights. These rights were fought for and plenty of blood was spilled for them. Remember, use them or lose them.

So do your homework and make sure you're protected from being sued. A Nevada corporation may be just the thing for you. And with the resources of the internet, you should have no problem finding some help. But first make sure you understand what you are buying. There is also plenty of bad advice out there. And, who knows, you might actually find a lawyer who knows what he's talking about when it comes to asset protection.

Yvonne Volante, the author, is a big fan of protecting assets and writes for assetprotectionnv.com, which is the premier asset protection resource on the internet. You can see all of the articles over at

<http://www.assetprotectionnv.com>



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