Communicating with and Understanding the Demanding Patient

Speaker: *There are about five thousand languages on earth, and we can’t find one we both understand!*
Listener: *What in the world are you talking about?*

**Communication: Latin com + unus = union**
A dynamic process of giving and sharing meaning, both verbally and nonverbally. Communication has been described as 7% verbal, 38% tone, and 55% nonverbal. The inherent duality can result in tension:
- being involved and maintaining independence
- being connected and sharing oneself and staying separate and protecting oneself
- as well as gender and social differences
These tensions make understanding one another a daunting task. No wonder we often get and give mixed messages when we do try to communicate. During stressful or upsetting times, effects of these factors are even more pronounced and can make an encounter aggravating for both physician and patient.

The two models of communication:
*Linear—mechanistic.* Assumes one meaning and thus one interpretation. Sender chooses correct words to convey the objective reality. Receiver is expected to interpret words as sender meant them.
*Helical—constructivist.* Dynamic, realities of both are interfaced and meaning is shared. Reality is constructed as it is experienced. Communication is a coordinated management of meaning.

**Tools of communication:**
- Verbal = linguistic
  - the message
  - the what-content
  - words-vocabulary
  - how strung together-syntax
  - meaning-semantics
- Nonverbal = paralinguistic
  - the metamessage
  - the how
  - voice-volume, pitch, rate, timbre
  - posture, expression, eye contact

**Angry/demanding patients:** Anger -from ancient Norse = *distress*
Anger is a secondary emotion. Look for the root cause: hurt, frustration, or fear.

Examples of root causes:
- Perceived hurt
- Unmet needs/expectations
- Violation of rights/injustice
- Attacks on self-esteem

**Four A’s of anger management:**
- Awareness
- Acceptance
- Analysis
- Appropriate reaction

**Techniques:**
- careful choice of words **address emotions**
- correct language
- reflection
- nonverbal cues

“I know you believe that you understand what you think I said, but I am not sure you realize that what you heard is not what I meant”