



Did They Get it? Strategies for Making Sure Patients Understand Your Message

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Making Cancer History®

Difficult Conversations in my Practice

- **Integrative Oncology**
- **International Patients / Cultural Issues**
- **Conversations about goals of care, end of life**
- **Teaching communication skills**

Goals for this Seminar

Develop strategies:

- to assess a patient's baseline understanding and information needs
- to continuously monitor a patient's understanding during your meeting
- to get the most value and efficiency from every patient encounter

Ground Rules

- **We (Chris and I) show rather than tell**
- **Your job: watch and listen carefully, evaluate what you see**
- **Stop action**
- **Learner participation (voluntary)**
- **We build teaching points together (Jane Frank will scribe)**
- **Chris and I respond to your input and replay the action**

Mrs. Jones

(played by Chris Witcher)

- **56-year-old woman with newly diagnosed rectal cancer.**
- **Treatment plan: radiation plus oral chemo, then surgery.**
- **She presents to medical oncology clinic with husband to discuss the treatment plan.**
- **Her doctor examined her and discussed overall plan.**

Ben the RN (played by me)

- **The doctor told Mrs. Jones the clinic nurse, Ben, would return in a few minutes to discuss details regarding risks of chemotherapy and the proper method for taking it.**
- **Ben is feeling a bit overwhelmed by how many patients he has to see in so little time.**

Foundational Skills

- Allow patient to get dressed
- Knock before entering
- Introduce yourself
- Clarify relationships
- Sit at eye level
- Address by formal title (Mrs., Mr., etc)
- Allow patient to read information for a few minutes, then return to review (to engage patient)

Intermediate Skills

- **Keep message clear and simple**
- **Avoid jargon**
- **Ask before telling:**
 - **“What does the word ‘chemotherapy’ mean to you?”**
 - **“Did you have a chance to read the handout?”**
 - **“Can you summarize the main points you took away from the handout?”**

Higher Order Skills

- **Recognize emotions: patient's & ours**
- **Address “feelings before facts”**
- **Validate emotions: “It’s OK to cry.”**
- **Respond to emotion with empathy**
 - **“I realize this is a lot for you to take in all at once.”**
 - **“I cannot imagine how difficult this must be for you.”**
 - **“Yes, that is a scary thought.”**
- **Create space in the conversation**