

Non-Verbal Communication

Interpersonal communication involves both verbal and non-verbal expression. Words normally express ideas, whereas nonverbal expression conveys attitudes and emotions. Non-verbal communication involves a complete mix of behaviors, psychological response, and environmental interactions through which we consciously or unconsciously relate to another person. It differs from verbal communication in that medium of exchange is neither vocalized language nor written word. The importance of nonverbal communication is underlined by the findings of behavioral scientists.

Why non-verbal communications are unique:

1. They mirror innermost thoughts and feelings; this mirror effect is constantly at work, whether or not you are conscious of it.
2. Non-verbal communication is difficult, if not impossible to "fake" during an interpersonal interaction.
3. Your non-verbal communication must be consistent with your verbal communication or people will be suspicious of the intended meaning of your messages.

Non-verbal message like a simple nod of head or a specific hand gesture may mean something to one person but something completely different to another. Therefore, non-verbal "cues" does have multiple interpretations.

Elements of non-verbal communication:

1. Kinesics (body movement).
2. Proxemics (distance between persons trying to communicate).
3. Physical environment.
4. Distraction factors.

Kinesics:

The manner in which you use your arm, legs, hands, head, face and torso may have a dramatic impact on the messages that you send. You need to generate a feeling of empathy and commitment to the helping of others. It is apparent, therefore, that your body movement or kinesics should complement this role.

A closed posture occurs when you have your arm folded in the front of your chest, leg crossed at the knee, head facing downward, and eyes looking away from the patient. If you hold this posture during an interaction, the other person may respond in similar no communication manner or may break off the interaction.

Components of kinesics:

1. Varied eye contact (consistent, but not a stare)
2. Relaxed posture.
3. Appropriate comfortable gestures.
4. Frontal appearance (shoulders square to other person).
5. Slight lean toward the other person.
6. Erect body position (head up, shoulders back).

Proxemics

The distance between two interaction persons plays an important role in non-verbal communication. In many cultures, people reserve the most protected space (within 18 inches from their bodies) for others with whom they have closed, intimate relationships. Interpersonal distance of more than 4 to 6 feet is generally reserved for public rather than private communication. Further distances would not be appropriate for patient

counseling, especially if other individuals are within earshot of the conversation. For sensitive issues, such as explaining the use of a rectal or vaginal medication, you may need to enter the patient's private zone, especially if other is found. Ideally, the pharmacy setting should provide various level of privacy so that both the sender and the receiver of messages feel comfortable.

Physical environment:

A number of environmental factors play important roles in communicating non-verbal messages to patients. For example, the colors used in the pharmacy's décor, the lighting, and the uses of space.

The general appearance within the pharmacy setting conveys non-verbal messages to patients. Dirt, clutter, and general untidiness carry negative non-verbal messages. Professional staff should be a very appropriately to send non-verbal messages to patients.

Distracting non-verbal communication:

The most distracting non-verbal elements:

1. Lack of eye contact (limits your ability to assess whether the patient understands the information and limits your ability to receive feedback from patient).
2. Many pharmacists unconsciously do not look at patients when talking to them.
3. Facial expression (feeling of disinterest, lack of concern toward the patient, and behavior expression).
4. Body position (most patient will judge your willingness to talk to them depend on perception of your body position like closed

stance with folded arms or a body position that is slouched forward or tilted to one side may be communicating reluctance on your part to talk with them).

5. Tone of voice (monotone voice may convey a lack of interest on your part and inappropriate tone of voice may create an entirely different meaning from one intended).

Dealing with sensitive issues:

A wide variety of embarrassing issues could exist within practice, included incontinence, sexual dysfunction, depression, menopause, hemorrhoids, contraception, and breast or prostate cancer. As pharmacist, you should be prepared to recognize situations that may be sensitive areas for patients. Therefore, you must dealing by the following:

1. **Watch your patients** (watch their behavior to get a clue about their feeling).
2. **Discuss sensitive issues with clarity and avoid potentially frightening scenarios.**
3. **Be aware of the potential for non-adherence** (many patients with sensitive issues do not follow their medical regimens as directed. Check medication refill rates and observe patient behavior when they are describing how they take their medication. If you suspect non-adherence to medication regimens, ask open-ended question to assess patient attitudes and feelings).

Suggested questions:

- 1- Mention the elements of Distracting non-verbal communication.**
- 2- Explain why the non-verbal communications are unique?**
- 3- Discuss the kinesics as one of the elements of non-verbal communication.**
- 4- Discuss the proxemics as one of the elements of non-verbal communication.**
- 5- How can you deal with sensitive issues regarding non-verbal communications?**