

Communication Strategies for the Challenging Clinical Interview and our Personal Hot Buttons

James T Hardee, MD

Joseph Cassara, MD



We all have them!



Can good communication with our patients help us uncover the “story” behind what we perceive as unreasonable behavior?



What are some of the difficult interactions you encounter in the exam room?



**How do your Hot Buttons
present in the exam room?**

How do you look, sound, and appear?



We may feel threatened:

- Physically
- Our sense of achievement
- Our sense of competence and confidence

We may feel embarrassed:

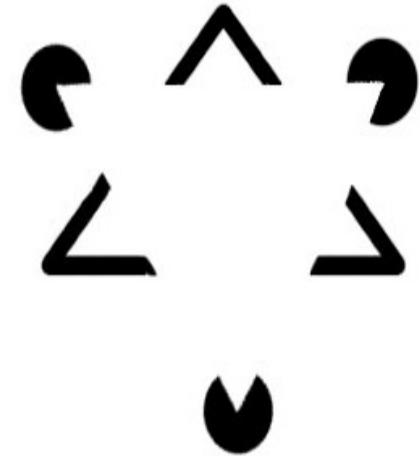
- Our frailties
- Our mistakes
- Associations with past experiences



Human beings are wired to see patterns as a survival tool

Our perceptions are shaped by past experiences

Law of closure



What are the costs if difficult interactions are unsuccessfully resolved ?



Two ways to end it too fast:

Be too confrontational



Be too avoidant



S State the other person's point of view:

- “Let me make sure I understand...”

O Observe: What is the emotional core?:

- Validate & empathize: “I can see how...”

S State your point of view:

- “My concern is that...” (include consequences, side effects, risks, etc)



Seek solutions: 3 escalated options

Offer a next step: *“Would you be willing to consider...?”*

Explore possibilities: *“How do you think we can partner to find solutions?”*

Cut to the chase: *“Given our different perspectives, is there any way we can work together on this?”*



Let's Try it!

Care Actor



SET LIMITS FOR YOURSELF:

“What I can do is...”

“What I can't do is...”



Use active listening & avoid interrupting

Don't answer emotions with facts & data

**Empathy can be most powerful when it seems
least intuitive**



Use “And...” instead of “But...”

“We” language builds partnership



- **Notice your Hot Buttons**
- **Don't get hooked**
- **Get curious, not furious**
- **Demonstrate empathy**



Further reading

Conversation Repair. Frederic W. Platt Little, Brown Press

Field Guide to the Difficult Patient Interview. F W Platt LWW Press

**Successful Management of Difficult Patient Encounters Patient Care
August 2006. Kuritzky, L.**

**Making the Most of Challenging Patient Interviews Patient Care
July 2004. Branch WT, Gordon GH.**



What Mediators Can Teach Physicians About Managing Difficult Patients. Am J Med March 2015. Fiester AM.

Watch the Tone of Your Voice. Medical Economics August 2016. Gladwell M.

An Overview of Empathy. Permanente Journal Fall 2004. Hardee JT

Getting to “No”...Strategies Physicians Use to Deny Patient Requests. Arch Int Med February 2010. Paterniti DA, et al.

