

# Ten Top Tips



## When dealing with challenging patients – for GP's

- 1. Clarify your patient's goals.** Often 'stuck' (ie stagnated/ dependent) or 'yes, but' (i.e. non-compliant) patients exist because they are unclear, or have not mentioned, what they hope to achieve by coming to see you and addressing the presenting problem still isn't meeting their true needs. You may know what your patient doesn't want, but are you clear on what they do want?
- 2. Compliment the patient.** 95 per cent of change in helping people is attributable to compliments. Use compliments to amplify something your patient is already doing well rather than focussing on what they are not doing well. Try saying something like: "It sounds like you handled that situation very well" or "I feel you are a determined and very caring mother."
- 3. View your patients as their own best advisors.** Be curious as to how your patients have coped with past difficulties and ask them what might their advice be to others experiencing similar problems. Then help them to apply this advice to their own lives.
- 4. Use scaling assessments.** People often attribute varying levels of significance to the same life issues. Scaling questions provide patients with their own assessments and invites them to work out what they need to do to improve their situations. Try asking: "If 1 is that this problem is unbearable for you and 10 is that it would be manageable, where are you now? What would need to happen to make things just one point easier?"
- 5. Reassess your patients' personal outcomes.** If patients are feeling stuck or despondent about their lack of progress, sometimes it is because their goals are too narrow or unachievable. They may need to be more realistic about their goals.
- 6. Encourage patients to take small steps.** When dealing with severely depressed, anxious or traumatised patients, big steps will seem difficult and overwhelming. Ask these patients what really small things would need to happen in the next 24 hours that would make things even a little easier for them. Then ask them what would help this to occur and encourage them to initiate this change.
- 7. Help patients to start thinking** about how they would prefer to see themselves. Ask your patient: "When you look back on this situation in five years' time, how do you want to be remembered for the way you dealt with this?"
- 8. Be human.** Ensure your patients feel they have been heard, cared for and not judged. Think about what attracts you to certain people when you need to talk about a problem and aim to emulate the positive behaviours in these people when you are with your patients.
- 9. Be aware** that you are making a positive difference to your patients' lives when you are patient, supportive and prepared to direct them toward helpful resources when they feel they are ready to make changes. Part of our respect for people is shown in our ability to trust that some patients will do things in their own time and may not be ready to make changes for a multitude of reasons. Not seeing or hearing change from a patient does not mean you are not being helpful.
- 10. Know your own limitations** and accept that you also need time out. It is imperative that you care for yourself by seeking support and help when faced with certain challenges presented by patients

