

## Editor's Desk



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Chief Editor

### EMPATHY A CLINICAL SKILL IN MEDICINE

In the medical education literature on teaching nonverbal detection and expression of empathy not covered satisfactorily. "Nonverbal aspects of communication become more crucial where language proficiency may be limited and with the increasing cultural diversity of patients visiting hospitals. Subtle non-verbal communication such as gestures, body position, and eye gaze including Empathy may be the critical entry point for important trust-building element in a physician: patient relationship.

Empathy is defined as how much compassion and understanding we can give to another.

- **Empathy is the action of understanding and being aware of another person's feelings and emotions.**
- **Simply put, empathy is the ability to step into someone else's shoes, and to feel and understand their needs.**

The understanding must be conveyed back to patients so that they know that it was understood.

In medicine, empathy is sometimes defined as ***a communication skill or as an emotional experience in which physicians identify and transiently experience their patients' emotional state based on visual and verbal cues.***

This important skill is addressed with a novel teaching tool for assessing nonverbal behaviour using the acronym E.M.P.A.T.H.Y.-E: eye contact; M: muscles of facial expression; P: posture; A: affect; T: tone of voice; H: hearing the whole patient; Y: your response.

This acronym was used in randomized controlled trial of empathy training at Massachusetts General Hospital, 2010-2012.

#### ***3 Types of Empathy:***

Renowned psychologists Daniel Goleman and Paul Ekman have identified three components of empathy: Cognitive, Emotional and Compassionate.

***Cognitive empathy*** is the ability to understand how a person feels and what they might be thinking. Cognitive empathy makes us better communicators, because it helps us relay information in a way that best reaches the other person.



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**Emotional empathy** (also known as affective empathy) is the ability to share the feelings of another person. Some have described it as "your pain in my heart." This type of empathy helps you build emotional connections with others.

**Compassionate empathy** (also known as empathic concern) goes beyond simply understanding others and sharing their feelings: it actually moves us to take action, to help however we can.

So Empathy is understanding, sharing, expressing, reflecting and taking action.

***A patient who is shown empathy is more likely to feel emotionally connected to their doctor. A doctor's ability to establish an empathic understanding of their patient's situation is considered essential to the development of a therapeutic relationship.*** This relationship is vitally important to practicing medicine effectively.

When a physician is empathetic, patients offer more detailed histories, they're more satisfied with their care, they are more adherent with treatment plans, and they are less likely to sue for malpractice. Empathetic physicians also benefit from better health, well being, and job satisfaction.

Expressing empathy is highly effective and powerful, which ***builds patient trust, calms anxiety, and improves health outcomes.***

Communicating empathically increases clinician job satisfaction and reduces burnout (Thirioux et al. 2016; Krasner, 2009; Shanafelt, 2009; West, 2011). Enhanced empathic care and physician well-being are highly correlated (Shanafelt, 2005 82% of medical malpractice claims are the result of breakdowns in communication.

Empathic clinician communication improves the quality of all interactions with others; patients, their families, colleagues, and loved ones (Halpern, 2012).

- ***4 steps to foster empathetic communication***
- Perceive and identify emotions: then classify those emotions (e.g., fear, anger, disappointment).
- Investigate and understand: Make sure to do this step without judgment, as position can influence the conversation. Be mindful of the language and don't deny or avoid the other person's perspective.
- ***Help them work on evolving their emotions:***
- Watch your non-verbal cues: make eye contact, nod your head and lean in to convey your presence and interest.



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we have learned from extensive research, the capacity for empathy is not merely an innate trait—it is also a skill that can be learned and expanded. Empathetic is an adjective that describes someone or something that exhibits empathy. **Empathetics** was founded with a mission to expand empathy and compassion by teaching individuals and teams how to understand, appreciate and respond to the perspectives and emotions of others.

Empathetics offers evidence-based educational tools and skills to build both individual and team empathic capacities to create authentic emotional connection with others in every healthcare encounter and beyond.

***Let us develop this important skill and create more Empathetics!***

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Chief Editorial***