

What's in a relationship?

The relationship that is formed between clinician and patient is the quintessential ingredient in patient outcome.....

It is easy to lose sight of how important the relationship that doctors, nurses, therapists form with their patients is on treatment and outcome. Research suggests that the quality of this relationship has an impact on:

- Whether a patient adheres to treatment
- Whether a patient seeks medical treatment into the future

A 17 year old girl (Bridgette) has recently been diagnosed with diabetes, and attends her GP for a routine visit. It is the end of a long day for the GP, who has had a number of difficult patients and a large amount of paperwork to complete before going home.

The GP rushes through Bridgette's appointment as quickly as possible. Bridgette feels frustrated and overwhelmed with her treatment plan, but doesn't mention this in the appointment with her doctor.

The following **qualities in the clinician-patient relationship** are suggested to have a significant impact on patient experience:

- Taking time to actively listen
- Empathy and understanding
- Discussing what to expect and when with treatment
- Providing explanations of how decisions have been made in regards to treatment
- Talking about difficult topics openly and without judgement
- Appreciating what patients have been able to accomplish rather than being harsh on non-adherence

As Bridgette gets older she begins missing appointments as she feels they are a "waste of time". In a busy practice her GP has little time to follow this up apart from the standard letters that are sent out. Bridgette's health begins to deteriorate as she struggles with the significant lifestyle changes her treatment requires.

Doctors who have become patients themselves note that: ***"that experience— involving helplessness, loss of power over one's very body and life, confusion and confrontation with the unknown – has the ability to make physicians appreciate fully what it is like to be a patient"*** (Klitzman, 2000)