

Empathy and Its Effect on Healthcare Outcomes

“People will forget what you said, and they will forget what you did, but they will always remember the way you made them feel.” – Maya Angelou

A presenter shared this quote at the Empathy and Innovation Summit at the Cleveland Clinic, which I attended a few weeks ago. Over three days, seven hundred people came together to learn more about what empathy is, how it can be fostered and the ways it can be used to help create better patient experiences.

So what is empathy? Empathy is the cognitive ability to recognize and understand someone else’s feelings, the emotional desire to relieve suffering and the behavioral ability to communicate back in a way that is helpful. Empathy allows a patient to express concerns, fears and priorities. It communicates care, concern and interest in a patient as a person. It respects a patient’s perspective and culture and encourages a patient’s participation in care.

It turns out that empathy may even be the cure to the common cold. Well, maybe not the cure, but a way to help a patient get better faster. A [study](#) in the medical journal of *Family Medicine*, found that “Clinician empathy, as perceived by patients with the common cold, significantly predicts subsequent duration and severity of illness and is associated with immune system changes.” Not only did patients feel good about the quality of the encounter they had with their clinician, they *actually* felt better afterwards. Their colds were shorter and not as bad as the colds of patients who said they did not feel that their clinician showed them much empathy.

Fortunately, clinical empathy is a skill being taught at many medical schools and one patients are demanding. According to the Association of American Medical Colleges, all medical schools now have classes in communication skills; they also report that 85% of patients rate communication as the most important factor in choosing a new doctor, ahead of board certification, number of years of practice and where a doctor attended medical school.

Doctors – don’t underestimate the importance of your bedside manner. And when you are bedside, make sure you are sitting down — patients will think you are there longer and will be more satisfied with the experience. They may forget what you said, and what you did, but they will remember how you made them feel.

For more, read [here](#).

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