

IMPROVING COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN MEDICAL PRACTICE BY MASTERING FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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Abstract. *The article is devoted to foreign language learning role in improving communication skills in medical practice. The authors claim the importance of the art of proper communication, notably in healthcare. The paper gives examples of how foreign language learning may help healthcare professionals improve their practical skills to have an effective conversation with the sick. It is concluded that mastering foreign languages is beneficial to doctors as it enables them to develop the necessary skills for maintaining a proper doctor-patient communication.*

Keywords: *foreign languages, communication skills, doctors, doctor-patient communication, linguistic means.*

One of the main goals of healthcare system is to treat the sick and perform preventive work aiming at maintaining the health of members of society. Yet it has recently become evident that medicine does not simply unite some selected issues of natural sciences such as biology, anatomy, physiology; it serves as an interdisciplinary science which also involves linguistic and philosophical questions. Therefore, doctors should pay attention not only to their competences relating to high-rated medical education, but also to the improvement of their skills to have a well-organized communication with their patients. The art of proper communication is known to have the same, if not greater, healing power as treatment has. One of the best ways to learn this art is through learning foreign languages.

Results. First of all, learning a foreign language requires regular practice and, therefore, patience [1] necessary for successful communication in medical sphere. The main reason for patients filing lawsuits against their doctors is their dissatisfaction due to not being listened to properly and not being fully understood [2] resulting from the lack of healthcare workers' patience. And vice versa: patients' satisfaction in doctor's communication competence correlates with their content of medical care in general [3]. Careful listening facilitates establishing a trustworthy doctor-patient relationship, which is a key factor for

therapeutic treatment success [2]. Moreover, the ability to listen to a patient carefully, especially at the stage of identifying complaints and history taking, enables a doctor delve into the physical, emotional and social impact of patient's problems on their life quality as well as determine the pain origin. One can be taught to remain patient while learning foreign languages. To achieve a required level of fluency takes time; doing grammar exercises takes time; making up sentences orally to share some ideas takes time. It is difficult, yet substantial, to master a target language. Such experience makes foreign language learners better conversationalists able to listen patiently. They know like nobody else it is important not to be interrupted while trying to express the thoughts in a foreign language. That is why they will be able not to interrupt their patients when they are talking about their worries [2]. The retrieved data will help a doctor to provide holistic care and correct treatment.

Another skill, which is obtained through learning languages and which is also of prime importance in the medical field, is being tolerant. Globalisation being an inevitable process of countries' integration affects all spheres of political, economic and social life including healthcare. People seeking medical advice may be of different cultural and religious background. Success of doctor-patient communication depends not only on the ab-

sence of a language barrier, but also on non-verbal aspects (eye contact and whom an attending physician has to address to, patients themselves, or their relatives) stemming from patient's beliefs and a background. Accepting the fact that people may have another opinion, follow different lifestyles comes while immersing oneself in the culture of the native to practice their language. The main way to avoid quarrelling and arguing is to remain nonjudgmental. Tolerating patients' different traditions, values, and outlooks, a doctor ensures a successful communication, and consequently good outcomes of patients' staying in hospital.

Thirdly, mastering the foreign language, especially its theory, one gets acquainted with different linguistic means of communication, the application of which may definitely improve communication skills, notably in medical practice. Correct implementation of pauses, intonation pattern changes, sentence stress, repetitive structures facilitate building trust between a patient and a doctor. For example, a doctor may emphasize the most important part of the sentence said to a patient using an emphatic pause as well as a sentence stress. Knowing about hesitational pauses (which are common with patients) enables a doctor to control the communication, and re-ask a question paraphrasing it so the patient could get it. Moreover, pauses promote attentive listening; proper doctor-patient communication should be patient-centered that is why doctor's speech should contain enough pauses to let a patient express his feelings, concerns, think of the first manifestations of the disease and the condition of its occurrence. Reduced questions facilitating history taking are an integral part of any medical consultation. "Why not?", "How?", "When?", as well as questions beginning with "any" are widely spread in medical practice [4]. Another linguistic feature of medical communication is syntactic repetition. Repetitive constructions serve as a means of verification of the information given by a patient. Such structures also help to determine how well a patient understood the information concerning his disease, medicine, restrictions [4].

Communication implies conveying information from one individual or a group to an-

other; in other words, information has to be clearly understood by both sides. Concerning medical communication, doctors need data to establish a correct diagnosis and treatment; patients are seeking information to know what is wrong, why they feel pain and to know the physician treats a patient and the disease appropriately [5]. The concordance between a doctor and a patient is achieved through mutual understanding. However, medical community is known for its specific vocabulary, which can result in comprehension difficulties due to the difference between doctor's and patient's lexicon. Patients may be not familiar with specific medical terms that makes healthcare professionals switch from a medical language to an everyday language [5]. Those who learn foreign languages are in an advantageous position as they are good at explaining their mind using common phrases. It is recommended to practice foreign languages with native speakers on a regular basis (as early as at the beginning of a learning process). Basic users do not dispose a rich vocabulary, yet wish to share a lot of thoughts that require knowledge of more difficult grammar structures and unfamiliar words. That forces them to express themselves within a limited vocabulary. Such ability is essential in medical practice, since doctors have to be able to immediately explain any details in a simple language despite the habit of using specific medical terms. When providing the information on what the patient is eager to know physicians have to avoid the use of medical abbreviations and jargon to satisfy patient's needs [2].

Conclusion. To conclude, learning foreign languages, a doctor masters not only another system of speaking, but also improves his communication skills that are very important in everyday practice. Learning basics of a foreign language for simple communicative purposes trains medical workers to develop such personal qualities as patience, tolerance, creativity, which make it possible to have a successful dialogue with a patient. Studying the language theory enables healthcare professionals to understand better the linguistic means of communication. Thus, the art of proper communication might be indeed improved by learning foreign languages.

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УЛУЧШЕНИЕ КОММУНИКАЦИОННЫХ НАВЫКОВ В МЕДИЦИНСКОЙ ПРАКТИКЕ ПУТЕМ ИЗУЧЕНИЯ ИНОСТРАННЫХ ЯЗЫКОВ

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***Аннотация.** Статья посвящена рассмотрению влияния изучения иностранных языков на улучшение коммуникационных навыков в медицинской практике. Авторы отмечают важность овладения искусством общения в сфере здравоохранения. В статье приведены примеры того, как изучение иностранных языков способствует улучшению у медицинских работников практических навыков по ведению эффективной беседы с пациентами. Делается вывод о пользе использования врачами иностранных языков: это позволяет им развивать необходимые навыки для поддержания грамотного общения между врачом и пациентом.*

***Ключевые слова:** иностранные языки, коммуникационные навыки, врачи, коммуникация «врач-пациент», лингвистические средства.*