Empathetic Telemedicine:

Strategies for building rapport and reassuring patient by video

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Learning Objectives

▪ List two methods to establish trust and a reassuring presence at the beginning of a visit
▪ Describe how to assess and explore emotional cues in a challenging encounter
▪ Show empathy through non-verbal communication (body language)
▪ Explain key actions to provide closure
Invest in the beginning

- Be intentional: opportunity to make a positive first impression
- Professionalism
  - Attire (include badge), background
  - Self-introduction and role on team
- Empathy
  - Non-verbal cues
    - Eye contact— with camera, use generously at the beginning
    - Tone of voice—slow down to portray that you are not rushed
    - Posture/expressions—reflect attentiveness and warmth, smile!
  - “Small talk before big talk”: invest in connecting momentarily
- Technology: set up ahead of time, help patient navigate
Assessing emotions and comforting patients verbally

- Narrate your behavior: verbalize off-screen activities
  
  “I'm listening carefully and will be taking a few notes as we talk.”

- If you are having difficulty reading the patient’s expressions, ask directly
  
  “How are you feeling about the diagnosis?”

- Name the emotion so there is no misunderstanding
  
  “You sound worried.”

- Acknowledge video as a barrier
  
  “It’s harder to do this by video but I want you to know I am here for you.”

- Verbalize what you would do in person
  
  “I wish I were there to give you a tissue or hold your hand.”
Assessing emotions and comforting patients verbally

- **Use empathetic statements**
  “I would feel frustrated also.”

- **Validate patient’s feelings**
  “It is normal to feel scared.”

- **Show appreciation**
  “This must be a difficult topic to discuss. Thank you for trusting me.”

- **Verbalize support**
  “I want to let you know that you can always contact me. I am here to support you through your treatment.”
More ways to convey empathy with non-verbal cues

Do:
• Sustain eye contact (with the camera)
• Show undivided attention by stopping all other activities
• Lean in
• Use purposeful facial expressions (smiling, widening eyes, lifting eyebrows)
• Place hand on heart or cheek for moments of empathy
• Use a pause or moment of silence to provide space

Avoid:
• Absentminded movements (looking away to type or fidgeting), which can appear distracted/uncaring
• Excess hand motions or crossing arms which can be distracting or seem disapproving
Provide Closure

• Transition to wrap up:
  • “We have a few minutes left and I would like to summarize our plan”
• Summarize discussion and next steps
• Incorporate the patient’s concerns:
  • “I know you are worried about your daughter’s health; it seems that like you are doing everything you can to support her. Self-care is important to support others.”
• Where can they find their visit notes or resources?
• When do they see you next?
  • “If your symptoms don’t worsen, let’s plan to check-in at 6 weeks.”
• Provide closure:
  “I’m so glad we had a chance to connect today. Please keep me posted of any changes.”
Thank you

Please contact us for any questions or comments:

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