
Why Communication Skills Training is Important in Healthcare



Marcy Rosenbaum, PhD
Professor of Family Medicine
University of Iowa Carver College of Medicine

A bit about me





Improving the quality of communication in healthcare

AGENDA



Importance of effective communication in healthcare

Impacts health outcomes

For Patients

- Physiological
- Psychological
- Behavioral
- Satisfaction with care

For clinicians

- Diagnostic accuracy
- Efficiency
- Work satisfaction
- Medical malpractice
- Use of resources
- Quality and safety

Common problems in clinician-patient/family interactions

General literature

- Not heard
- Interrupted
- Questions and concerns not elicited or addressed
- Inappropriate type and amount of information
- Lack of shared decision making
- Lack of empathy and support

2019 Irish HSE patient experience survey

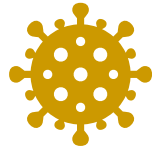
- Unclear on discharge plans, medical side effects
- Family communication around care and discharge planning
- Insufficient time to talk to doctors
- Not involved in decision-making
- Limited availability of emotional support

Some recent challenges in clinical communication



Technology

Electronic
medical record
Telemedicine
Digital health
information
and
misinformation



Pandemic

PPE
Isolation
Risk
communication



Population groups

Migration
Cultural
responsiveness
Displaced
persons



Workforce Issues

Burnout
Time pressures
Interprofessional
teams

Premise: Effective clinical communication can be learned

Communication skills training

- can have a positive impact on learners' clinical communication skills
 - can lead to improvement of patient outcomes and patient satisfaction with care
 - can increase clinician wellness and decrease burnout
-

How to teach clinical communication



Best practice communication teaching

Specific educational approaches are required for behaviour change

Delineation and definition of skills

Learner centred

Observed practice

Learner reflection

Well intentioned, descriptive feedback

Repeated practice and rehearsal of skills



When to teach communication skills



Health professions communication teaching: The current state

The Good News

- A core competency, required by accrediting bodies
 - Worldwide, many health professional schools now have significant communication skills curriculum
 - Much less in Postgraduate and Continuing Education
-

Communication teaching: Medical school

- **When:** Mainly during pre-clinical years
 - Emphasizing importance early
 - During available curricular time
 - **How:** Experiential (Group or 1:1 practice, with simulated patients, video, reflection, feedback)
-

Current state of communication education

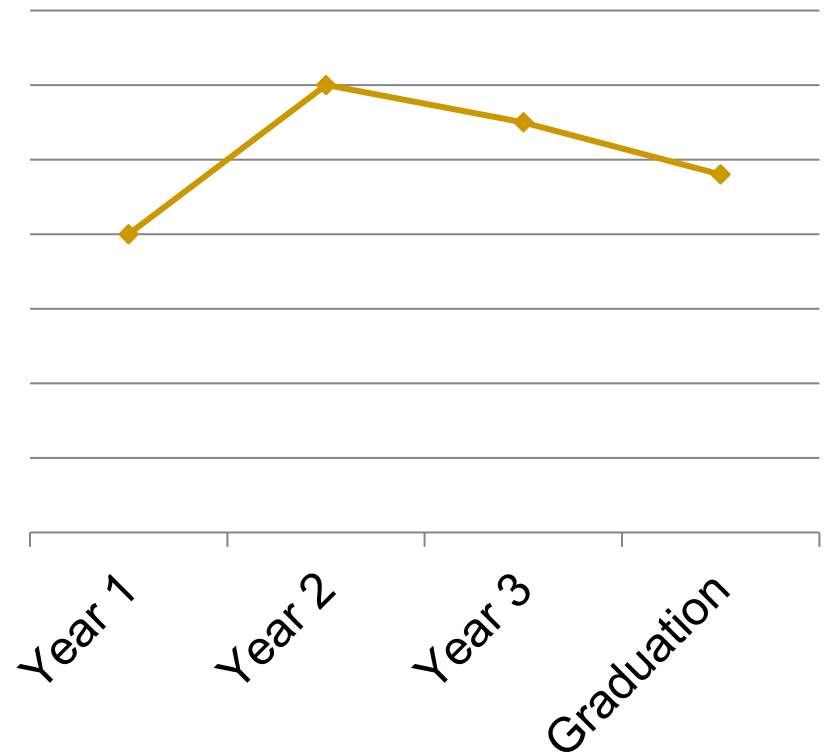
Some not so good news

Perceived as:

- “Soft” vs “Important” focus of study
- “Ideal” (fake) vs “real” medicine

Healthcare learners’ communication skills and attitudes deteriorate during longitudinal training

Communication Skills and Attitudes



- Kauss 1980, Kraan 1990, Craig 1992, Pfeiffer 1998, van Dalen 2002, Haidet 2002, Hook 2007, Bombeke 2010, Neumann 2011, Brown 2012 ; Laughey 2019

When to teach communication skills

Guiding Principles

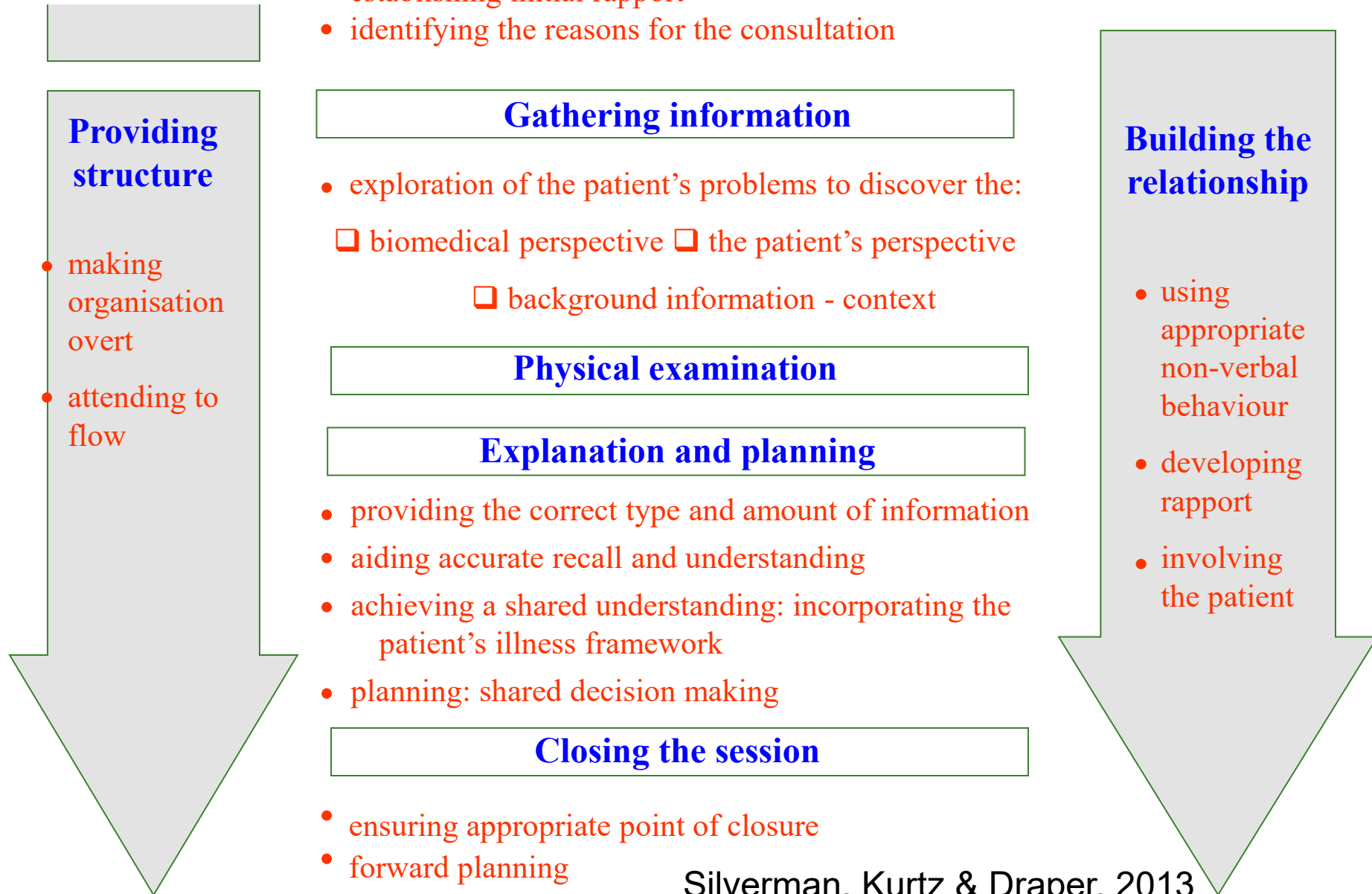


Longitudinal

Helical

Integrated

Common
communication model



Opportunities for integration



Across the Curriculum

Undergraduate

- Pre-clinical
- Clinical

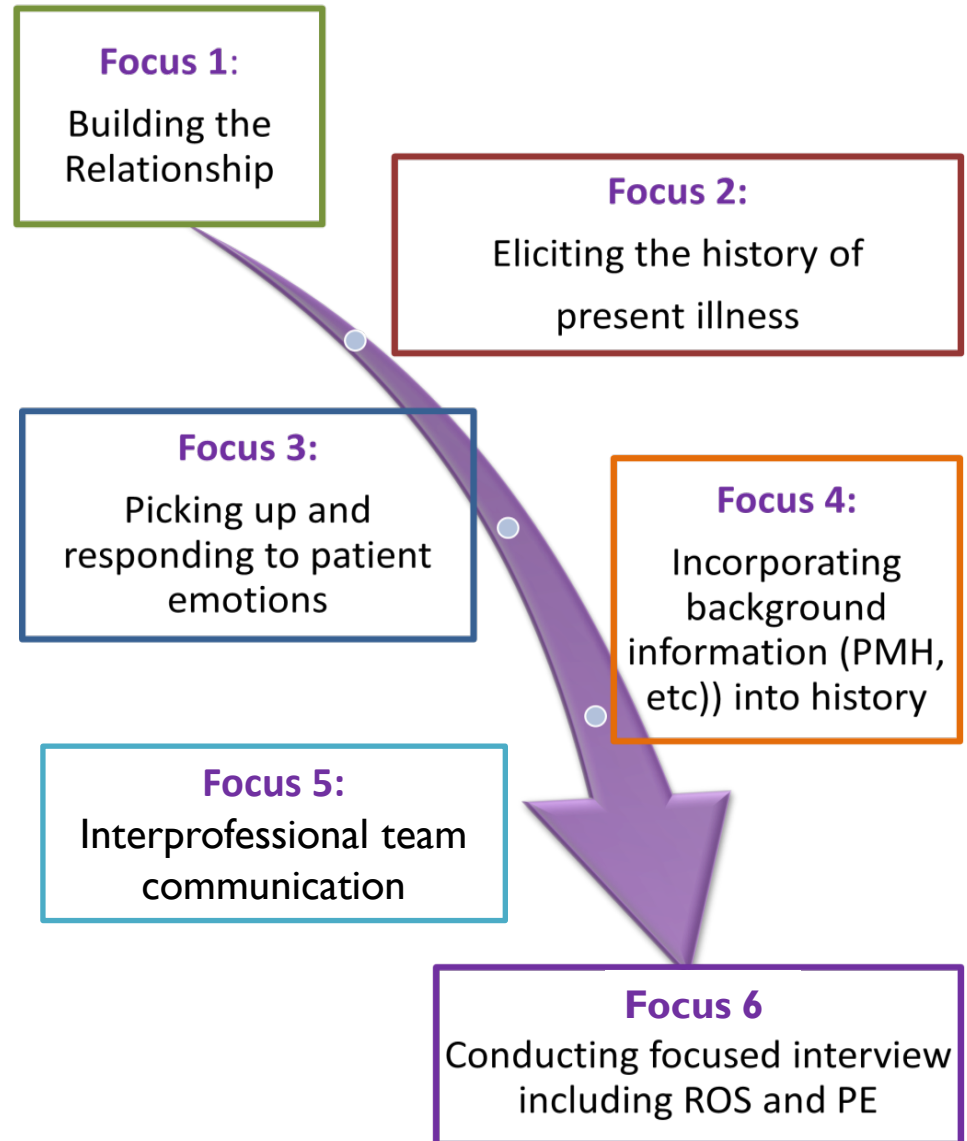
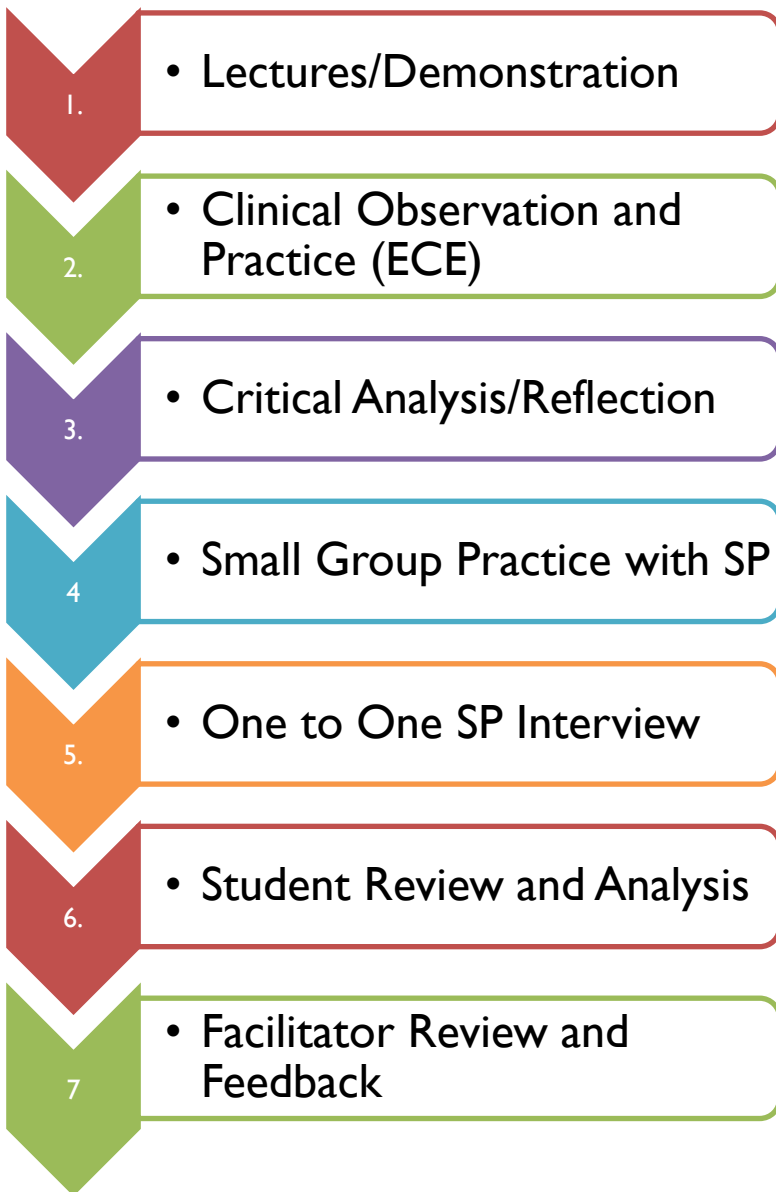
Postgraduate

Practicing clinicians

Undergraduate communication skills training



Pre-Clinical Communication Curriculum: University of Iowa



Year 2 (6 months): Hospital medicine, sexual history, motivational interviewing

RCSI pre-clinical communication curriculum

- Early clinical experiences
- Experiential communication skills sessions
- THEP will increase integrated focus on communication skills with other clinical skills and case-based learning



Integrating communication training into clinical clerkships

- **Reinforce and validate** content and skills emphasized in formal curriculum
- Address more **advanced communication skills and issues** in preparation for professional practice
- Address **interviewing challenges** learners face in clinical practice

Iowa Clinical clerkship communication curriculum:

“Just in time” context specific experiential sessions with SPs

Reinforced by workplace learning/assessment

Transition
week:

Bad news telling

Inpatient
medicine

Information sharing, goals of
care, informed consent,
handoff

Outpatient
medicine

Shared decision-making,
student identified
challenges.

Emergency
medicine

Crisis conversations,
bad news

Ob/gyn

Sexual history taking

Psychiatry

Suicide risk assessment

Family
Medicine

Motivational interviewing,
geriatric assessment

Pediatrics

Information sharing,
adolescent interviewing

RCSI THEP: Similar and more extensive context specific integration planned

Limitations of formal curriculum

- Learning skills in formal curriculum does not necessarily **translate** to actual practice
- **Informal curriculum, workplace- based learning** in the context of clinical care with clinical teachers, has significant impact on practice

Learning in the Clinical Workplace

Iowa research on learner perspectives on CS learning in the workplace

Students reported learning communication mainly by:

- **observing** supervising faculty and residents
- **conducting** interviews themselves
- feedback on **patient presentations**

Majority of students report communication skills rarely **explicitly** addressed by clinical teachers

Some opportunities to teach communication in the context of clinical care

- **Role Modeling** for learners
 - **Staffing:** Responses to learner presentations
 - **Observation** of learner interactions with patients and **feedback**
-

Postgraduate communication skills training



Postgraduate communication training

- Variable communication training in medical school
 - Responsibility for patient care comes with many new challenges
 - Information sharing
 - Informed consent
 - Bad news telling
 - Time constraints
 - Systematic reviews show communication improvement but lack of consistent training
-

Iowa Postgraduate communication training

- New hospital-wide initiative
 - All residents trained in core and specialty skills
 - Partnering with each program
 - Specialty and level specific cases
 - Departmental co-facilitators
 - Adjusted to their curricular time
 - Simulated patient practice and feedback
 - Workplace based reinforcement a continued challenge
- Anesthesia
 - Dermatology
 - Emergency Medicine
 - Family Medicine
 - Internal Medicine
 - Neurology
 - Neurosurgery
 - Ob/Gyn
 - Ophthalmology
 - Otolaryngology
 - Pediatrics
 - Psychiatry
 - Radiation Oncology
 - Surgery
 - Urology

Communication Skills Training at RCSI Surgical Training



TAUGHT SKILLS

SURGICAL AFFAIRS PROGRAMMES

Core Surgical Training (N=400)

Core and Higher Emergency Medicine Training (N= 200)

Irish College of Ophthalmologists Training (N=40)

College of Physicians and Surgeons in Pakistan (N=20)

Continuous Professional Development Scheme (N=520)

Masterclasses for Consultants (N=40)

MSc in Human Factors in Patient Safety (N=30)

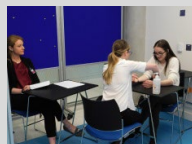
Building Rapport	Gathering Information	Giving Information	Taking Consent	Shared Decision-making	Breaking Bad News	End of Life Care	Conflict Resolution	Handover	Teamwork	Multidisciplinary conversations	Challenging conversations	Behaviour Change and Adherence	Disclosure
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓		✓
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

TEACHING METHODOLOGIES



Didactic

Small group work



Skills rehearsal



TAUGHT MODULES

Talking to Patients and Relatives
Professional Interactions
CRM in Trauma 1
CRM in Trauma 2
Advanced Communication
Advocacy and Negotiation
Managing Adverse Events and Disclosure
Leading in Acute Events
Teamwork

Communication Skills
Train the Trainer
Advanced Communication
Open Disclosure
Mastering Difficult Interactions with Patients
Mastering Shared Decision-making
Mastering Adverse Outcomes
Mastering your Risk
Mastering Professional Interactions

Human Factors in Patient Safety in Surgery and Emergency Medicine – Summary table

Years	Module title	
Bootcamp	Human Factors and Non-Technical Skills Consent	
1	Error Risk and Safety in Hospital Practice Talking to Patients and Relatives Professional Interactions	
2	Resilience Training Trauma Crisis Resource Management: team communication Trauma Crisis Resource Management: clinical communication	
3/4	CYCLE 1 Advanced Communication Managing Adverse Events	CYCLE 2 21 st Century Professionalism Safety Management
5/6	CYCLE 1 Decision making Managing Teams Evaluating Non-Technical Skills	CYCLE 2 Leadership Expert Performance Advocacy and Negotiation
7/8	CYCLE 1 Train the Trainer Leading in Acute Events	CYCLE 2 Healthcare Management: Preparation for Practice Presentation and Interview skills

Communication skills training for practicing health care professionals



Communication training for health care professional

Majority of cited problems related to practicing clinicians

Skills can be refreshed and honed with new tools and new challenges

Has quality, safety and financial implications for healthcare systems

Increasing examples of systemwide training with significant outcomes

University of Iowa Healthcare and Clinics Provider Communication Program

Initiated in 2018

Mandated for all physicians and
advanced practice providers in 2021

5 hour experiential workshop of core
skills plus application to participant
specific challenges

30 and 60 day post observation and
feedback from trained communication
coach

Significant increase in patient
satisfaction scores across institution



National Healthcare
Communication
Programme



“
They listened to my concerns and answered all of my questions, without ever dismissing me.”

Evidence indicates that good communication can have a profound impact on healthcare outcomes and on patient experience of care.

The National Healthcare Communication Programme runs a series of workshops to support staff to develop and enhance their communication skills.

MAKING CONVERSATIONS EASIER

FIND OUT MORE:
www.hse.ie/nhcprogramme
@nhcprogramme

EA|CH International Association for Communication in Healthcare

FIND OUT MORE:
www.hse.ie/nhcprogramme
@nhcprogramme

The National Healthcare Communication Programme runs a series of workshops to support staff to develop and enhance their communication skills.

MAKING CONVERSATIONS EASIER

EA|CH International Association for Communication in Healthcare

National Healthcare Communication Programme



Enhance your communication skills

WORKSHOPS FOR HEALTHCARE STAFF
We are running short workshops to support healthcare staff to learn, develop and enhance their communication skills with patients, their families and with colleagues.

MAKING CONVERSATIONS EASIER

FIND OUT MORE:
www.hse.ie/nhcprogramme
@nhcprogramme

EA|CH International Association for Communication in Healthcare

National Healthcare Communication Programme



“
They always had a nice word and a smile, and that made all the difference.”

Evidence indicates that good communication can have a profound impact on healthcare outcomes and on patient experience of care.

The National Healthcare Communication Programme runs a series of workshops to support staff to develop and enhance their communication skills.

MAKING CONVERSATIONS EASIER

FIND OUT MORE:
www.hse.ie/nhcprogramme
@nhcprogramme

EA|CH International Association for Communication in Healthcare

National Healthcare Communication Programme



Workshop practice

FIND OUT MORE:
www.hse.ie/nhcprogramme
@nhcprogramme

EA|CH International Association for Communication in Healthcare

National Healthcare Communication Programme

DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

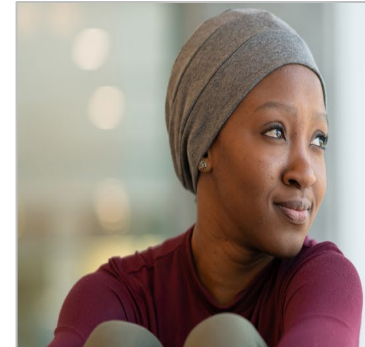
CALGARY-CAMBRIDGE GUIDE



MAKING CONVERSATIONS EASIER

FIND OUT MORE:
www.hse.ie/nhcprogramme

EA|CH International Association for Communication in Healthcare



“
They listened to my concerns and answered all of my questions, without dismissing me.”

FIND OUT MORE:
www.hse.ie/nhcprogramme

National Healthcare Communication Programme

A GUIDE TO COMMUNICATING WHILE WEARING PPE*

* PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT
@twisteddoodles

COMIC BOOK HEROES WEAR MASKS HEALTHCARE HERO

COMIC BOOK HEROES ARE TERRIBLE AT INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

MASKS AND OTHER KINDS OF PPE CAN MAKE COMMUNICATION DIFFICULT

HERE'S SOME TIPS AND SKILLS TO HELP YOU BE A BETTER COMMUNICATOR!

FIND OUT MORE:
www.hse.ie/nhcprogramme

National Healthcare Communication Programme

**Building a
Better Health
Service**

Seirbhís Sláinte
Níos Fearr
á Forbairt

EA|CH International Association for
Communication in Healthcare

Making conversations easier

Additional considerations and challenges

- Faculty development
 - Relevant communication skills
 - Effective teaching skills
 - Resource intensive undertaking
 - Getting buy-in from learners at all levels and leadership
 - Assessment and remediation
 - More research opportunities
-

Final word

RCSI and Ireland can increasingly be international leaders and innovators in effective communication skills training

Thank You!!

RCSI, the Fulbright program, Hannah McGee, Eva Doherty, Gozie Offiah, Paul Kinnersley, Winifred Ryan and Peter Gillen

