

# The Art Of Asking Questions

*"How many of our patients don't hear us because they are distracted by pain, financial concerns, time constraints or just the stresses of life?"*

One of the goals of the Tuesday Minute has always been to remind you about things you may already know but may not be utilizing. Sometimes valuable clinical pearls can fall by the wayside when we hear about a new technique or just get too busy. I have an odd story that reminded me of one of the most valuable lessons in clinical practice, "the art of asking questions."

It starts of all places with dental floss. While flossing my teeth I popped off a gold crown and obviously had to get it re-cemented. As the oldest of nine children, we lived on noodles and starch, so it didn't surprise me when my new dentist commented that I was no stranger to the dental chair. As he reviewed the potential work to be done in my mouth, I decided to have



my teeth cleaned. I was surprised to discover that I had some inflammation in the gums of one tooth.

The hygienist was giving me specific instructions how to floss that tooth. But, I was so distracted by the fact that I had infection and inflammation and that I needed to replace two crowns, I didn't really hear her. She gave me clear instructions, but I wasn't paying attention because I was preoccupied. I wonder, "How many of our patients don't hear us

because they are distracted by pain, financial concerns, time constraints or just the stresses of life?"

If patients don't hear us, they can't follow our instructions properly. With this story in mind, I asked my daughter-in-law for some feedback when she was in the throes of a battle with Crohn's disease. At that point in her life, she lived in another state so I referred her to a clinician who I consider "a nutritional rock star". He is one of the smartest

people I know, he lectures all over the world teaching doctors how to use nutrition. I wanted to know, if she understood the nutritional recommendations he made to her. Sadly, she said she was in so much pain and guilt from her condition that she understood very little of what he said and minimally followed his instructions.

Can patients follow our instructions and make major changes in their diet and lifestyle properly, if they don't understand the rationale? They may follow them halfheartedly at best but eventually they will revert to old habits. Old habits are familiar and die hard.

Dr. George Goodheart, the father of applied kinesiology and to me one of the greatest chiropractors of all time, used to tell his patients three times, in three different ways, what to do and what the result would be. Here's a sample dialogue pertaining to low blood pressure and fatigue and a form of cocarboxylase called Bio-3B-G.

"If you take two tablets of Bio-3B-G every waking hour for 10 days then three tablets with each meal thereafter, your low blood pressure will come up and you'll have more energy." Then he might re-emphasize. "You will have more energy when your blood pressure comes up, so take two tablets of Bio-3B-G every waking hour for 10 days." And the third way may sound like this "The cells in your body will burn sugar more

efficiently if they have sufficient B vitamins. Taking Bio-3B-G two tablets per waking hour for 10 days will build nutrient cellular reserves and eventually you will have more energy."

Dr. Goodheart intentionally gave instructions three times to assure patient compliance.

Knowing Dr. Goodheart words of wisdom, and then forgetting, I've reminded myself to intentionally give instructions in three different ways. However based on my experience, I am also committed to ask my patients "what they just heard". I mean there is hearing then there is HEARING.

Using our example of hypotension and Bio-3B-G I may say, "Mrs. Jones, in your own words, explain how we are treating your hypotension?" or "Mrs. Jones, can you tell me why you're taking two tablets of Bio-3B-G every waking hour?" Starting the second appointment like this may give an entirely different direction to the visit.

Asking questions to assure you are being understood may not be the "coolest clinical pearl" you have heard this year, but it may be the most important one to keep your patients compliant and ultimately help them regain their health.

Thanks for reading this week's Tuesday Minute. I'll see you next Tuesday.