

CLOSING THE SESSION

INTRODUCTION

At the end of the interview, hopefully you will have discovered all the information that you need and can prepare to present your findings to the team or write up the clinical record. But before doing so, you need to take your leave of the patient. Even if as a student you do not feel that you are empowered to give any information or be a true part of the patient's care, there are several steps you need to achieve which will benefit both you and the patient.

Summarising and clarifying next steps for both you and the patient, establishing what the patient should do if things do not go according to plan, checking that the patient is comfortable, continuing to build the doctor-patient relationship - these are all essential elements of the consultation.

Your objectives for this part of the interview may be summarised as:

- clarifying next steps for both doctor and patient
- establishing contingency plans
- making efficient use of time in the consultation
- continuing to encourage the patient to feel part of a collaborative process and to build the doctor-patient relationship for the future

The following skills work together to help us achieve the objectives for this part of the consultation.

Forward planning

- Contract with patient re next steps for you and the patient
- Safety net appropriately - explain what to do if plan is not working, when and how to seek help

Ensuring appropriate point of closure

- Summarise session briefly and clarify plan of care
- Check that patient agrees and is comfortable with plan and ask if any corrections, questions or other issues
- Thank the patient

Forward planning

Contracting:

Contracting with the patient about next steps for both you and the patient allows each partner to identify their mutual responsibilities. You may need to state explicitly that you will try to get a doctor to inform them of their results if this issue has arisen earlier in the interview. The patient may need to ask their relative for information that they cannot remember.

“So, I’ll ask Dr Jones to see if your results have come back and ask him to speak to you later today. Meanwhile, could you remember to ask your mother about which immunisations you had as a child and let me know?”

Safety-netting:

Establishing contingency plans is a key step in closure. Explaining what the patient should do if things do not go according to plan provides important back-up. Explaining possible unexpected outcomes and when and how to seek help are important steps not only in safe medical practice but also in relationship building. Explain to the patient that they must let a member of staff know if they develop any more pain. Explore what the patient should do if his wife is unable to pick him up and he needs hospital transport.

Ensuring appropriate point of closure

End summary:

We have looked at the value of internal summary for information gathering and structuring the interview. Summary is an essential tool in this part of the consultation too. Summarising the session briefly and clarifying the plan of care not only gives you and patient the chance to confirm their deliberations but can also act as a highly valuable facilitative tool allowing the patient to question or amend your perceptions.

“So, just to recap, the main problems you still have are breathlessness and weight loss and you hope that the CT scan result will help the doctors discover what the problem really is. Is that right?”

“Yes that’s it in a nut-shell – although I really would like someone to help me with the pain too – those pain-killers just aren’t working ”

Final checking:

Check finally that the patient agrees and is comfortable with the plans that have been made and to ask if they have any corrections or questions.

“So are you happy we have covered everything - do you have any other questions before I go?”

Thank the patient:

Don’t forget to thank the patient for their time