

At all stages of your medical training there is an expectation that you can identify your weaknesses and discuss plans for improvement.

Knowing your own strengths and weaknesses, it entails realizing the effect of your behavior on others and the influence of your own emotions and prejudices on your judgments and behavior. The aim of increasing self-awareness is to be able to manage the impact of your emotions in your day to day practice—and to improve your relationships overall.

Advise for effective communication

- **Use clear language:** tailor your language to your patients' understanding and information needs.

- **Be conscious of your non-verbal communication:** It is important to maintain eye contact—reading notes or looking at the computer screen may convey negative messages.

- **Negotiate an agenda:** Ask patients what they need from the consultation, and explain what can be covered.

- **Establish a dialogue:** Determine whether your patient agrees with the diagnosis and management plan. Patients who disagree with the diagnosis probably won't adhere to the treatment.

- **Be flexible in your consultation style:** Tailor your approach to the individual patient. A more directive style may be appropriate for patients who want less involvement in decision making. A supportive style—listening attentively and asking questions about psychosocial issues—helps facilitate the disclosure of sensitive information.

- **Provide the information that patients want:** Doctors tend to talk too much about drug treatment, whereas patients want to know about causes and the likely diagnosis and prognosis. They want more openness about side effects and advice on how to relieve pain and emotional