



COMMENTARY

Sociological Aspects of Healthcare for the Elderly: Understanding and Communicating with Older Adults

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Introduction

Healthcare providers, in particular Internists and Geriatricians, should bear in mind the commonly known (but, at times, overlooked): that with advanced age comes a change in how a patient's body and mind function. This can affect how an older adult thinks, how their memory operates and how they view the world.

The senior's worldview is much different than a younger person's perspective. The elderly, after all, have been young; they can relate to younger people. But, plainly, the younger person has never been old; they cannot truly identify with the older adult.

How can a healthcare provider, caregiver or family member better relate and communicate with an elderly person? Here are some ways—some *do's and don'ts*—to establish rapport with them and to assess their mental status.

- Ask them about some of their cherished memories.
- Look at their surroundings for some interesting items. Ask them to tell you the stories behind them.
- Inquire about their hobbies. Ask them to explain how they do those things.

Simply put, be curious about them. They may have some amusing and compelling tales to tell!

- Do not, however, be condescending. Always treat them with respect.
- Use their name. Do not create nicknames for them, such as honey, sweetie, etc.

And remember, they may have impaired hearing.

- Speak up, but do not shout.

- Speak slowly and clearly.
- Face towards the person when speaking to them.

There may be other matters to consider and address.

- Ask them their concerns about any decisions that need to be made for them, such as giving up driving, moving to an assisted care facility, etc.
- Do not force realities upon them. If they refuse to accept or cannot cognize an unfavorable fact or adverse circumstance in their life, back off from the issue.
- Do not talk about them to another person or provider in their presence. Do not talk with them about another's personal problems or health conditions. This may cause discomfort that you might be talking about them "behind their back".

It is possible to lose focus and patience when dealing with an elderly adult that has compromised physical abilities or mental faculties. Thus, when entering the senior's room or when otherwise in their company, the healthcare provider, caregiver or concerned family member should maintain a demeanor of common courtesy and common sense. It may prove helpful to know and to utilize the aforementioned insights—*do and don'ts*—to better understand and communicate with older adults.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares that this Commentary was written in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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