

Communicating with challenging patients

Tony Doyle, 27, is a regular attendee at his GP's surgery. On this visit, he is worried that he has Multiple Sclerosis.

Pre-watching

- 1 Based on what you have learnt in Unit 10, what strategies should the doctor be using to deal with a patient who regularly visits his/her GP with a variety of unrelated complaints?

Global observation

- 2a Watch the whole clip and answer these questions.
 - 1 How successful do you think the interview has been for the doctor and the patient?
 - 2 Do you think there is communication breakdown during the interview?
 - 3 How do you think the doctor and patient feel at the end of the interview?
 - 4 How would you describe the doctor's tone of voice?
- 2b Watch the clip again with the volume turned down and note down examples of the doctor's non-verbal communication. Evaluate these in line with models of good communication.

Watching for detail

Part 1: from Start to *I have checked this up.* (00:00>01:59)

- 3 Watch Part 1 of the clip and decide whether the doctors uses any validating language.
- 4 Watch Part 1 again and identify at least two opportunities where the doctor could have acknowledged the patient's feelings.
- 5 What do you notice about the patient's non-verbal communication when the doctor suggests that he is unlikely to have MS? How does the doctor respond to these non-verbal cues?

Part 2: from *I have checked this up* to *Is there anything else going on in your life?* (01:59>02:26)

- 6 Watch Part 2 of the clip and complete the dialogue.

Patient: I'm pretty sure I have got MS. I have checked this up.

Doctor: Mr Boyle, _____
_____ what you say, but I feel that I would really like to explore other options to make sure that we haven't, that we don't miss anything—

Patient: What? Well are you saying you don't believe me?

Doctor: _____ to what you have to say—

Patient: I'm telling you the truth!

Doctor: But I'm _____ trying to explain to you that MS is not the only diagnosis. Just _____ me a moment.

Part 3: from *Is there anything else going on in your life?* to End.

- 7 Watch Part 3 of the clip and complete the examples below where the doctor empathises with the patient.

1 Patient: ... I lost my job three months ago.
Doctor: That _____ pretty difficult.

2 Patient: ... she's gone to stay with her mum.
Doctor: So _____ for you. So things are looking _____.

- 8 Why do you think the doctor uses validating language in this part but not the previous one?
- 9 Towards the end of the clip, when the patient is responding to her question about neck pain, what non-verbal indication does the doctor give to show that she is listening? How could this be improved on?

Over to you

The patient's belief that he has MS is a key issue in the consultation. The doctor does not challenge him directly on this belief, although there are a number of opportunities.

You are faced with a similar situation. How would you take steps to challenge the patient's claim in a calm but assertive way?

Work in threes, taking it in turns to play the role of the doctor, patient and observer.

Doctor: you should take steps to challenge the patient's claim that he has MS in the early stages of the interview.

Patient: you are willing to accept what the doctor says, providing you are given a clear explanation of why you do not have MS.

Observer: make a note of the stages that the doctor covers from the recommended model. Observe how well the doctor uses his/her body language and voice to convince the patient. Observe how the patient responds to the doctor's suggestions.