Bridging the Gaps: Empathy as a Communication Skill

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Disclosure

Co-founder
Chief Scientific Officer

E.M.P.A.T.H.Y. (TM)
One Topic: 4 Main Ideas

Empathy Deficit in Healthcare

- Burnout Risk Reduction & Cost
- Patient Experience
- Health Outcomes

HELEN RIESS, M.D. © 2015
Empathy Training RCT: Study Objectives

- To determine whether physicians can improve their empathy and relational skills through a training skills program that focuses on the neurobiology and physiology of emotional communication.

- To determine whether improvement in empathy can be demonstrated in patient ratings of physician empathy.
Improvement in Knowledge

PHYSICIAN’S KNOWLEDGE OF THE NEUROBIOLOGY OF EMPATHY

Percentage of Physicians

Training: 76%
Control: 44%

p < 0.001

MGH RCT

Riess, Kelley, Bailey, Dunn, Phillips. JGIM 2012
Facial Expression Decoding

Score Improvement

TRAINING VS. CONTROL

20.5

2.5

Training

Control

MGH RCT
p < 0.001

Riess, Kelley, Bailey, Dunn, Phillips. JGIM 2012
Improvement in Ratings

GIVEN BY PATIENTS TO PHYSICIANS’ EMPATHY (CARE)

Percentage of Physicians

57%  

Training

32%  

Control

MGH RCT

p = 0.04

Riess, Kelley, Bailey, Dunn, Phillips. JGIM 2012
## Patient-Rated CARE Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Patient-Rated CARE Items</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Riess, Kelley, Bailey, Dunn, Phillips. JGIM 2012</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
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<td>Riess, Kelley, Bailey, Dunn, Phillips. JGIM 2012</td>
<td>0.03</td>
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<tr>
<td>Riess, Kelley, Bailey, Dunn, Phillips. JGIM 2012</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riess, Kelley, Bailey, Dunn, Phillips. JGIM 2012</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riess, Kelley, Bailey, Dunn, Phillips. JGIM 2012</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riess, Kelley, Bailey, Dunn, Phillips. JGIM 2012</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riess, Kelley, Bailey, Dunn, Phillips. JGIM 2012</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Program Evaluation and Self-Assessment of Improvement

Program Evaluation

- Did you find the training interesting? 94%
- Did you find the training helpful? 98%
- Will you apply the concepts you learned to your clinical practice? 98%

Riess, Kelley, Bailey, Dunn, Phillips. JGIM 2012
### Program Evaluation and Self-Assessment of Improvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Improvement Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening carefully to patients without interrupting?</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpreting non-verbal cues (tone of voice, posture, affect)?</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being aware of your physiological reactions to challenging patients?</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being able to manage your physiological reactions to challenging patients?</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being aware of your emotional reactions to challenging patients?</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being able to manage your emotional reactions to challenging patients?</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding the latest research on the neurobiology of empathy?</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After the training, did you improve in...

Riess, Kelley, Bailey, Dunn, Phillips. JGIM 2012
A new study reveals that they can.

Dr. Helen Riess, director of the Empathy and Relational Science Program in the department of psychiatry at the Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, created a series of empathy “training modules” for doctors. The tools are designed to teach methods for recognizing key nonverbal cues and facial expressions in patients as well as strategies for dealing with one’s own physiologic responses to highly emotional encounters.

June 21, 2012
One Year Follow-up Study

MEEI Pilot

Physician Empathy CARE Score

Pre-Training: 25.1
Post-Training: 28.5
1 Yr Follow-up: 28.3

P = .05
P = .01

Phillips, Lorie, Kelley, Riess. EJPCM 2013
How we treat patients affects their physical health outcomes.
## Patient-Clinician Relationship Affects Medical Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author (year)</th>
<th>Medical Outcome</th>
<th>Intervention Type</th>
<th>p-Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bolognesi et al. (2006)</td>
<td>Obesity</td>
<td>Motivational Interviewing, Empathy Trust, Patient-Centered Care, Trans-theoretical Model [stages of change]</td>
<td>.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chassany et al. (2007)</td>
<td>Osteoarthritis</td>
<td>Improve Communication; Empathy, Group discussion led by facilitator; focused on patient-physician relationship, pain evaluation, prescribing and negotiating a therapeutic contract</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cals et al. (2009)</td>
<td>Lower Resp. Infection</td>
<td>Improve Communication: Empathy and Shared Decision Making, Patient Centered Approach</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleland et al. (2007)</td>
<td>Asthma</td>
<td>Improve Communication: Written Material, Empathy role playing, patient resources</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Habits that promote with empathy

Listen before speaking
Learn about the Chief Concern not only Chief Complaint
Learn about what the other person is feeling
Avoid projecting your own feelings on to others
Show curiosity about the other’s perspective
Beware of defensiveness
Suspend judgment until you understand the person
Understand before giving advice
Be sure you understand the problem before trying to fix it
MGH Empathy and Relational Science Program

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