

When the Bottom Line is Bedside Manner

“The physician needs a clear head and a kind heart; his work is arduous and complex, requiring the exercise of the very highest faculties of the mind, while constantly appealing to the emotions and higher feelings.”

-- Sir William Osler (1849-1919), physician & writer

By Shauna Marie Tillman

Patient: With an ailing cold and your spirits dismal, you drag yourself to the doctor's office to obtain a professional diagnosis and the typical treatment. Your doctor is a well educated, cordial person who seems to empathize with your condition. You like your doctor ... *if you didn't you would switch.*

Physician: With a detailed file in hand and confidential information on the next patient, you skim the reason for their visit, brief yourself on the patient's possible emotional state and enter the room. You offer a handshake, smile accordingly and ask the usual, “Hello, how are you doing today?” Your professional approach of concern, balanced temperament, word choice and response to the situation must not only win the patient's trust, but have them leave your office with grateful regard.

During the few minutes of interaction with a patient, a physician must sell his skills like a product to a client. He must have the ability to recognize and understand emotions, and use awareness to manage his relationships with others. If a patient does not like the physician for whatever reason, he will take his business elsewhere. *Sound like a familiar story?*

A physician is a business. The EQ skills self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship

management are the real crux of each patient-physician interaction, typically dubbed “bedside manner.” Bedside manner is translatable to any profession whose bottom line is not just inventory and payroll, but also returning clients and a dedicated staff. The benefits of emotional intelligence to a physician's practice are indistinguishable from any Fortune 100 corporation. Doctors and CEO's are facing a similar challenge: to grow client relationships by honing in on indispensable humanistic skills, such as emotional intelligence.

There is growing awareness within the medical field that bedside manner needs to be a required component of coursework. Physicians and CEO's alike know that turnover (patient, client or staff) and litigations greatly depreciate the bottom line and stability of a business.

On June 14, 2004, the National Board of Medical Examiners began a movement supporting the training and certification of future doctors in bedside manner.

Prior to receiving their license, medical students must now prove they can master a clinical-skills test that grades their ability to communicate clearly with patients, listen intently without

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interrupting, and perform a detailed physical exam. Been there, done that? This new test is the latest attempt by the medical field to address a problem patients have been complaining about for decades: **Some doctors, though technically skilled, have a poor bedside manner.**

"Patients in any state of the union have the right to expect that physicians, no matter where they've trained, have the same set of skills, tested and certified in the same way," said Dr. Peter Scoles ⁽¹⁾ of the National Board of Medical Examiners. "This is fundamentally a question of patient safety. When physicians don't listen and patients don't understand, mistakes happen."

Case and point; correctly understanding emotions is essential in preventing misunderstandings and mistakes within every business relationship. Furthermore, preventing litigation via improving bedside manner is gaining attention within the risk management field.

Patient rapport and bedside manner can be assessed, scored and improved as emotional intelligence skills. The four unique skills of emotional intelligence capture nearly everything we do that is not a function of how smart we are.

Dixie L. Fisher, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of the Division of Medical Education at University of Southern California's School of Medicine, told TalentSmart[®] ⁽²⁾, "...the school (Keck School of Medicine) has implemented a new case-based curriculum. In addition, there is a new Professionalism in the Practice of

Medicine course that all first and second year students must take and pass. The course teaches all aspects of professionalism such as self-awareness, ethics, empathy, doctor/patient relationships, team work, etc. Although we don't call what we teach emotional intelligence (EI), I believe EI is an important component for success as a physician. Components of EI are incorporated into the course by having students write self-reflection pieces, and by us and their peers evaluating them on their ability to work as team members."

If emotional intelligence is just now being integrated into newly required bedside manner courses at medical universities, the question might be posed, "How do we measure EQ?" and "What about the seasoned professionals who are not aware of the need to develop EQ?" The answer: An appraisal of an individual's emotional intelligence will give them a much needed platform to accurately assess their skills, and then guide improvements in their EQ.

Whether an accomplished physician or CEO, it is essential for all to consider the bottom line of bedside manner: Emotional intelligence (EQ) captures the side of life that typical 'smarts' do not.

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- (1) A Matter of Speaking Medical Students Face Mandatory Bedside Manner Test. (2004, June 14). ABCNews.<<http://abcnews.go.com/sections/WNT/Medicine/CuttingEdge/bedsidemanner040614-1.html>> (2004, Jun 16).
- (2) Fisher, D. <dfisher@usc.edu> (2004, July 7). Su, L. D. [Personal e mail]. (2004, July 7).

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

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Shauna is the Public Relations Manager for TalentSmart[®], a leading provider of emotional intelligence tests, training and consulting. Shauna's unique experience with research, writing and leadership serve her well in this position.

Shauna is known for developing distinctive PR campaigns and special events that bring companies to life. Shauna donates much of her free time to promotion for public service organizations, such as *New Beginnings for Animals*, *The Susan G. Kolmen Breast Cancer Foundation*, and *The Boys and Girls Club*. Prior to joining TalentSmart[®], Shauna was the Public Relations Coordinator at Gonzo Communications, a technology PR firm located in Rancho Santa Margarita, CA.

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