

The Patient Whisperer:

Compassionate Care for
Challenging Situations

Kathi Niccum, Ed.D.
Director of Patient Services
The Renal Network, Inc.

Web Ex Presentation: January 2010

Cowboy and Horses

-
- Uses force
 - Uses tactics of fear and domination
 - Breaks the horse's spirit



Horse Whisperer

-
- Has self-confidence
 - Uses body language
 - “Joins up” instead of “breaks” the horse
 - Leads through trust, respect and mutual agreement



Grant Gollher

Patient Whisperer

Has the ability to relate to patients using **interpersonal communication skills** that include acceptance, honesty and integrity



Patient **W**hisperer

Withholds Judgment

- Of self
- Of patient
- Of other staff

Patient **W**hisperer

Has Compassion

- Sympathetic consciousness of others' distress together with a desire to alleviate it (Merriam-Webster Dictionary)
- Getting out of our own point of view
- Focus stays on the patient

Patient Whisperer

Insightful

- Observation
- Trust your gut
- Feelings are within our consciousness

Patient Whisperer

Sensitive

- Receptive to patient's needs
- Responsive to patient's needs
- Professional boundaries

Patient Whisperer

Positively Reinforces

- Provides positive feedback
- Has patience - builds positive behavior in small steps
- Motivation

Patient Whisperer

Empowers

- Patient control
- Staff control
- Choices



Patient Whisperer

Respects

- Listen to self
- Listen to patient
- Respond versus react

Patient Whisperer

Equal Partnership

- Communication
- Collaboration
- Health care team member

Patient Whisperer

Relationship Building

- Trust
- Safety
- Honesty

Case Examples



The Cowboy

versus

The Whisperer



“ I don’t want that tech to stick me!”

What’s involved

- Past Experience
- Level of confidence – patient/staff
- Personalities

Cowboy Approach

- “You have no choice...”
- “It only took 5 tries - What’s wrong with you!”
- “You always complain..”



Patient Whisperer Approach

- Understand and accept where patient is
- Collaborate on solution
 - Assign different person
 - Wait for another person
 - Have tech observe “good” stick
 - Have tech stick while observed

“What do you mean you’re changing my schedule?”

What’s involved

- Routine
- Fear
- Respect
- Loss of control

Cowboy Approach

- Give schedule change on day of treatment
- “This is your new time – take it or leave it”
- Patient starts missing treatments/ comes late/ or leaves early: Label “non-adherent”



Patient Whisperer Approach

- Give information that the schedule process is changing
- Gather information regarding special needs
- Collaborate to find what will work best

“ I don’t have to come all the time– I’ll come when I want...”

What’s involved

- Denial of need for regular treatment
- Feels too sick to leave home
- Transportation issues
- Time management

Cowboy Approach

- Threat: "If you don't start coming, we'll discharge you..."
- Shame: "You know better than to miss treatment..."
- Guilt: "We had your machine set up and we have someone else who wants to come at this time, if you don't think your treatments are important..."



Patient Whisperer Approach

- Calls to check on patient
- Sends patient a letter of concern
- Shares concerns with patient and listens to patient for understanding.
- Provides choices and boundaries
 - Set up machine *after* patient arrives
 - Change shift
 - Lose shift / call in for time

Tools for Patient Whisperers

DPC Tool Box

- In-service training program for staff
- Proactive and not reactive
- Creates a calm environment
- Communication skills
- Work together to find solutions

Tools for Patient Whisperers

Healthcare Team Agreement

- Also known as behavioral contract
- Changes made by both staff and patient
- Time line: Start and end points
- Collaborative effort

Tools for Patient Whisperers

Motivational Interviewing

- Stages of change
- Monitors degree of readiness to change
- Staff takes cues from patient
- Collaborative approach

Tools for Patient Whisperers

Coaching Techniques

- Agreement that problem exists
- Inspires, encourages, and challenges
- Provides tools, knowledge, and opportunities to become more effective
- Follow-up with patient

Tools for Patient Whisperers

In-service Training Programs

- Communication skills
- Professional boundaries
- Conflict management
- Stress management

Tools for Patient Whisperers

Contact the
Patient Services Department of your
ESRD Network

- Assist with challenging behaviors
- Provide workshops and in-services
- Offer and develop resources and tools

Kathi Niccum, ED.D

Director of Patient Services
The Renal Network, Inc
317-257-8265

kniccum@nw10.esrd.net
www.therenalnetwork.org
