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Communicating with Children

Soft-skills in communicating with children: Medical jargon versus simple language

Pediatricians and the medical staff are looked upon as authoritative figures with professional knowledge in the field. The language they use when talking with other medical staff, i.e. medical terminology is made up of learned words with Greek and Latin suffixes and prefixes, abbreviations, eponyms, acronyms is also known as the *Medical Jargon*. Use of medical jargon can create a communication barrier with adult patients, let alone with kids. Communication barriers due to use of medical jargon often go undetected and can have serious effects on the health and safety of patients. Therefore, pediatricians should:

- Explain everything as clearly as possible to a patient without using confusing medical jargon;
- Use simple words, short sentences, speak slowly;
- Simple pictures can be used when necessary;
- Communicate in key points, avoiding excessive information with emphasis on what the patient should do; unnecessary information should be avoided: most patients will not remember more than three messages;
- Encourage patients to ask you questions (Ask Me3).

The language can also greatly influence a child's assessment of a situation, so the use of "softer" language is encouraged in order to influence positively a child's expectations. Instead of using words like "burn" or "shot," a pediatrician will use "warm" or "poke." The goal is to soften language but still be honest with children while keeping compassion and understanding of their situation foremost in mind.

Be professional, yet courteous and kind – a necessary softskill that surfaced in the questionnaire-based survey of softskill needs administered in the project countries.



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