

A Review

of

Communication Skills in Pharmacy Practice: A Practical Guide for Students and Practitioners, Third Edition. By William N. Tindall, Robert S. Beardsley, and Carole L. Kimberlin.

Philadelphia, PA: Lea & Febiger. 1994. Softbound. 218 Pages. 5 Illustrations. Price \$25.95.

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This is the third edition of a communication skills textbook that many pharmacy educators already know well. The book covers issues that are important to practicing pharmacists and pharmacy students alike. The book clearly explains basic concepts in communication theory and describes key components of communication skill in the context of pharmacy practice. The frequent use of realistic examples strengthens the presentation, as does the authors' familiarity with contemporary pharmacy practice. The book should be useful as a text in introductory courses on patient counseling or health communication for pharmacists.

The authors appear to have chosen breadth of coverage over depth in planning the book. The three main parts of the book comprise ten total chapters. The chapters are fairly short (17 pages on average) and are not thoroughly referenced (about 7 references and 4 recommended readings per chapter). The result is that many issues are discussed, but few are discussed very deeply. Given the applied nature of the material and the intended audience, this format is probably appropriate.

The book's preface and prologue contextualize the chapters to come, emphasizing the societal function served by pharmacists, the shift from a product to a service orientation, the focus on patient outcomes as the ultimate goal of practice, the legal requirements of OBRA '90, and the importance of communication in the medication use process.

Part 1 of the text attempts to answer the question "What is communication?" Included in this part are chapters on principles of interpersonal communication, perception and communication, nonverbal communication, and communication barriers. Chapter one lays out a standard model of communication, and the components of the model (i.e., sender, message, receiver, barriers, and feedback) are briefly defined. The chapter goes on to discuss the context-sensitivity of meaning, the need to bring verbal and nonverbal messages into alignment, and the need for

feedback. The authors recommend recording and reviewing one's own performances as a way to increase self-awareness and improve skill. Chapter 2, on nonverbal behavior, describes how body movements and interpersonal distance can either facilitate or hinder effective health communication. The importance of nonverbal sensitivity is noted. Chapter 3 recites an all too familiar list of barriers to communication (e.g., time, privacy, prejudice, etc.), but concrete solutions are left to other chapters or not discussed at all.

Part 2 focuses on "Practical Skills for Pharmacists." The practical skills covered here are listening, empathic responding, and assertiveness. One must possess these skills to practice pharmaceutical care, and these two chapters provide an adequate introduction. The chapter on empathy presents a standard Rogerian view of empathic responding. Pharmacists should listen attentively, recognize and reflect feelings non-judgmentally, avoid simple reassurances and advice-giving, and avoid probing and distracting. Assertiveness is discussed in the following chapter, with examples pertaining to patients, physicians, and colleagues. Passivity and aggressiveness are contrasted with assertiveness, and tips are offered for asserting oneself effectively.

Part 3, entitled "Putting It All Together," attempts to synthesize the material from the preceding 6 chapters and make it relevant to everyday pharmacy practice. It does so by discussing interviewing and assessment, the improvement of patient understanding, tips for dealing with patients in special circumstances, and the ethics of patient care. The interviewing and assessment chapter contains a good conceptual framework for assessment with many practical suggestions, including badly needed advice on appropriate use of the telephone. The chapter on improving understanding contains pointers on making information memorable and comprehensible. Pharmacists should eliminate jargon, use open-ended questions, and verify patient understanding. The information will be familiar to readers who are acquainted with the Indian Health Service's interactive approach to patient counseling, which is surprisingly absent from the chapter's references. Chapter 9, on communicating in special situations, discusses sensory deficits, aphasia, terminally ill patients (including AIDS patients), and psychiatric

patients, but the treatment of each is so brief that the effect is primarily to raise awareness rather than to describe strategies and techniques for dealing with such patients.

Chapter 10 discusses basic ethical principles, describes the development of moral reasoning, and provides a practical framework for ethical decision-making. The chapter is organized around three cases that give the student a chance to apply the ethical principles in question. The lengthy epilogue includes 19 cases for discussion and analysis. Also included are study questions for each chapter and three tables that summarize and provide mnemonics for the hints and strategies described in previous chapters.

The technical production is poor in places, with errors and inconsistencies in the references and inadequate spacing between words on several pages. This, and the relatively superficial treatment of certain topics are the book's only notable shortcomings. The book is required reading in my course on communicating with patients, where it works quite well when supplemented with primary source material. Since these skills are only developed with practice, a teacher's manual, with guidelines for designing and evaluating role-played interactions would make the book even more valuable, especially to instructors whose primary expertise is in pharmacy rather than communication. Still, taken as a whole, the book represents a commendable effort to summarize a vast and disparate body of literature for an audience with pressing practical concerns. If students and practitioners could master the skills and concepts discussed in this book, the goals of pharmaceutical care would be immeasurably advanced.