

Ten Top Tips



When dealing with challenging patients – for Nurses

1. **Clarify your patient's goals.** Helping patients to become clear and to set realistic goals will generate motivation. If you have only five minutes, help your patients think about what they can start doing to help them achieve what they do want.
2. **Encourage patients to take small steps.** Ask patients what small things would need to happen in the next 24 hours that would make things even a little easier for them. Then ask them what would help this to occur and encourage them to initiate this change. Don't focus on the bigger picture because this can be too overwhelming.
3. **Compliment the patient.** Encourage patients by complimenting them or their family members. Focus on the things they are doing well, rather than on the negative.
4. **View your patients as their own best advisors.** Ask how patients have coped with past difficulties and what their advice might be to others experiencing similar problems. Then help them to apply this advice to their own lives.
5. **Use scaling assessments.** Scaling questions provide patients with their own assessments and invites them to work out what they need to do to improve their situations. Use a scaling assessment similar to pain management, in which 1 is no pain and 10 is the most unbearable pain. Ask them where they are now and what would need to happen for them to rate one point higher.
6. **Reassess your patients' personal outcomes.** If patients are feeling stuck or despondent about their lack of progress, it is often due to them having set unrealistic goals. Encourage them to start thinking about what they can do to feel more independent or less depressed.
7. **Help patients to start thinking** about how they would prefer to see themselves. Ask the patient: "When you look back on this situation in x years' time, how do you want to remember the way you dealt with it?"
8. **Confronting or trying to talk down to people** who are aggressive or highly emotional is not helpful. If a patient or family member is emotional and you are unable to defer the conversation/confrontation until they have had an opportunity to settle down, use calming language to convey your message.
9. **Understand the difference** between intentions and impact. Often the behaviours of patients and work colleagues can have a negative impact upon you, although they may never have intended this to happen. If you are unsure of their intentions, ask them to help you understand them. Guessing what they mean may result in the wrong impressions.
10. **Know your own limitations.** There are times when helping also means knowing your limitations. It is important that you care for yourself by seeking support and help when faced with certain challenges presented by patients.

