**Tool to Support Patients   
Through Behavioral Change**

**Open-ended questions.**  Avoid asking questions that can be answered with a “yes” or “no.” Broad questions allow patients maximum freedom to respond.

\_\_\_ “What’s been going on with you since we last met?”

\_\_\_ “If you had one habit to change in order to improve your health, what would that be?”

\_\_\_ “What goal would you like to set?”

\_\_\_ “What might be one thing you could consider doing/changing?”

\_\_\_ “You seem \_\_\_\_\_ (*feeling*). Tell me about that.”

**Affirmations.** Never underestimate the power of expressing empathy during tough spots or in celebrating patients’ accomplishments. When you review patients’ goals, take joy in their success and show your joy.

\_\_\_ “You seem happy with your \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ *(weight, blood pressure, energy).* That’s great.”

\_\_\_ “It sounds like you are really trying to\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ *(eat less junk food)*. I’m proud of you.”

\_\_\_ “You’re doing such a nice job at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ *(getting up early to walk).* I’m putting a gold star in your chart.”

**Reflective listening**. Patients often have the answers; the clinician’s role is to help guide them. Reflective listening involves letting patients express their thoughts and then, instead of telling them what to do, capturing the essence of what they have said without judgment. It is also appropriate to acknowledge the patient’s mood about what he or she is telling you.

Patient: “I wish I didn’t eat so much fast food.”

Doctor: “You eat fast food fairly often.”

Patient: “Pretty much every day. I know I shouldn’t, but it’s just easier.”

Doctor: “It’s easier because you don’t have to plan and cook meals.”

Patient: “And I can just run over to the drive-through.”

Patient: “Right... I guess there are some healthy items on the menu.”

Doctor: “So you don’t want to give up the convenience of fast food, but you would like to eat healthier.”

**Summaries.** This involves recapping what the patient has said, calling attention to the salient elements of the discussion, and allowing the patient to correct any misunderstandings and add anything that was missed. Summaries are particularly helpful in bringing the visit to a close.

\_\_\_ “I am wondering what you’re feeling at this point.”

\_\_\_ “I am wondering what you think your next step should be.”

\_\_\_ “It sounds like you are saying...”      \_\_\_ “... did I get that right?” *(summarize in about 10 words)*

The open-ended questions in Tool 12 are adapted from: William R. Miller and Stephen Rollnick. Motivational Interviewing: Preparing People for Change. 2nd ed. The Guilford Press, New York, 2002.

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