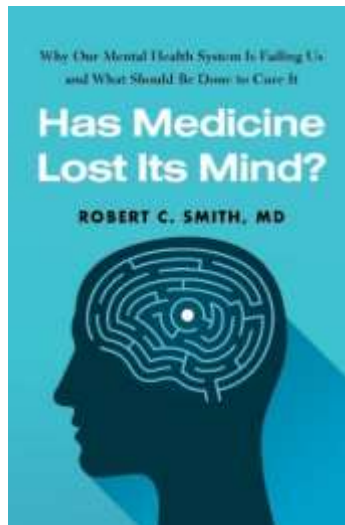


## **HAS MEDICINE LOST ITS MIND?**



### Newsletter 11: ***Person-Centered Communication*** October 2024

Dear (name),

Our research at Michigan State led to an evidence-based patient-centered interview. Unfortunately, many inferred that such communication practices apply only in medicine. In this newsletter, excerpted from HAS MEDICINE LOST ITS MIND?, I'll show how you can use these basic communication skills in everyday life. Best to call them person-centered skills, as Carl Rogers did. Try them out with someone you know, the results will amaze you.

To best communicate with another person, keep your own ideas to yourself. Instead, pay attention to their comments, issues important to them. Then encourage further talk. You could say, "Tell me a bit more about that" or simply echo what they said to facilitate more on that topic, such as, "So, they'll soon move your job elsewhere," or "Betty didn't invite you." Such statements confirm you're following the conversation, and that they should continue.

Use the same open-ended skills for a few minutes to get a better understanding of the story. This will often reveal potential emotional information. Even if the person quickly moves away from a loaded topic, keep them focused on it with a statement like, "Tell me more about not getting along with your boss/your relationship with Betty." Once you have some understanding of this evolving story, ask them what emotion or feeling they have about it. For example, "How did that make you feel when you thought they would fire you?" or "What's the emotion when Betty said that?" Next, try to understand their feelings more fully: "Tell me more about being depressed/angry."

If the person does not report an emotion to your inquiry ("Nothing, I guess"), delve further, for example, suggesting something like, "If that were me, I might feel a bit down/upset," using these non-threatening terms. Or, you might say, "I can tell by the look on your face that he/she upset you." Using this approach, you will typically identify an emotion. If not, let it go, don't push so much as to make them uncomfortable.

Unfortunately, no one tells us how to show empathy. Here it is. Now that you have identified an emotion, make empathic statements using the mnemonic **NURS**—for **N**ame, **U**nderstand, **R**espect, and **S**upport:

**Name the Emotion:** “So, you’re upset (happy, angry, sad, afraid).”

**Understand the Emotion:** “I can understand that.” “Anyone would be upset (sad, happy, irritated).”

**Respect the Emotion:**

- **Acknowledge Plight:** “You’ve really been through the mill on this.” “Wow, that’s tough.”
- **Offer Praise:** “You did the best you could.” “Good you’re able to talk about it.”

**Support the Emotion:** “Let’s work together on this.” “We’ve got your back.”

Use one or two NURS statements at a time and deploy them frequently during the evolving interaction. For example, “That’s upsetting (*naming the emotion*), it makes sense to me (*understanding the emotion*).” Depending on the person’s response, in 30 seconds or so, you might say, “That was hard on you.” (*Respecting the emotion by acknowledging plight*). Then, after listening for another 30 seconds or so, “I’m pleased you’re telling me” (*respecting the emotion by praising*), or “How do I help?” (*Supporting the emotion*). Continuing to deepen your understanding of what’s going on (using variations of ‘tell me more’ and echoing), intersperse NURS comments throughout the conversation. For most situations, 3-5 minutes suffices to understand and support the person.

Now, what if you hear about a really bad situation (serious illness, death in a family, divorce)? While it’s often true that you can’t do anything specific to help, being empathic (“NURSing them,”) makes people feel better. Even in irremediable situations, distressed people say that someone expressing empathy helps them. They know you can’t fix the problem.

The editor has put HAS MEDICINE LOST ITS MIND? in final form and ready to go to press this week, still on course for publication March 4, 2025. If it interests you, the publisher has agreed that recipients of this newsletter can receive a 20% discount on purchase of the book. More specifics to follow on how to do this.

Take care!

Bob