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# Patient Recovery: The Importance of Human Connection

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# Patient Recovery: The Importance of Human Connection

When we enter a medical facility, it's because we're at stage where we can no longer fix the problem we're facing on our own. These facilities can create a range of emotions for people, with some of the most commonly experienced being fear and anxiety. This may be due to a procedure, unfamiliarity with the surroundings or uncertainty of what's ahead, whatever the reason, this can make the experience very daunting and unsettling. As part of seeking help, the desired outcome is to feel better. Our likelihood of this happening is influenced by a number of variables such as age, genetics and preexisting health conditions, all of which we have little control over. However, what healthcare professionals can influence that is a big factor for both patient emotional wellbeing and recovery, is the importance of human connection.

As humans, we are hard wired to want human connection and this has been crucial in our survival for thousands of years. As we have evolved, this has remained a key aspect to human life and continues to show us just how important this is for our survival. We use this for many aspects of our everyday lives, whether it's helping us cope with stress and major life changes or maybe it's to help us forget about negative aspects of our lives to make us think more positively. Whatever the cause is, the underlying desired outcome is clear, we do this to make ourselves and those around us happier. For healthcare professionals human connection has a considerable role in how well a patient recovers. The more positive their experience is, the greater the outcomes can be.

Positive and meaningful human connections begin during our first interaction with a person. Our initial assessment of a person is largely based upon their physical being and in healthcare settings this is perhaps manipulated as we have preconceived ideas of the types of people in these roles. Our perception may be further influenced by factors like uniforms being worn as this removes the

personality of that person, or this may indicate the role of the person which feeds into these preconceived ideas. Because of this, we make further assessments based on verbal and non-verbal communication. It's in these moments that we are able to determine if we trust the person, if we believe we are safe with them, and if we feel comfortable in their presence. Beyond these initial moments, communication continues to be a crucial element in our connection with people as this is how we exchange information between one and another and build a rapport with them.

As the patient's health is the number one priority, protective measures such as the use of PPE are often implemented in these settings to ensure both the patient and the healthcare personnel are safe. However in doing so, this creates a physical barrier by covering the face which further distances the healthcare personnel from the patient, making the patient feel even more isolated. Because of this, the last piece of understanding for the patient is taken away from them and this can have huge implications for their health outcomes.

When there is a requirement to wear PPE, in particular respirators, safety glasses and face shields, it's important to find solutions that maintain safety first and foremost but allow for human connection to exist. As the eyes and mouth have been indicated as the two key regions for both verbal and non-verbal communication, it is obvious that having these areas visible and clear of any obstructions is crucial in patient connection and comprehension when communicating. Because of this, loose-fitting respirators with powered air supply have been identified as future focused PPE solutions, as they maintain a clear field of view of the healthcare personnel's face which supports that natural connection that we get when we are not wearing any forms of PPE.

## Road to recovery

It has been found that positive expression of emotions helps to increase the rate of recovery for patients. Simply having a visible smile and being able to clearly communicate and interact with the patient can be enough to help build rapport and trust. When patients believe that the healthcare professional is genuinely concerned about their welfare they are more likely to comply with their treatment which results in better health outcomes. By going beyond the mandatory duties of healthcare roles this positively influences patient's recovery, making them feel more optimistic which leads to experiencing less pain and recovering much more quickly than patients that have a negative experience with greater levels of anxiety and mistrust.

This clearly indicates that physical wellbeing is very much intertwined with emotional wellbeing. All of these interactions are based upon an experience which are generating greater health outcomes for the patient.

By them being happier, this influences the body's immune response which gives them a better chance of fighting off whatever it is they are battling against and are more likely to lengthen their lives. Therefore it becomes clear that being able to build these relationships with patients is vital to providing the treatment that the patient needs and everything possible should be done to maintain this normal human connection as this can be the difference between life and death.

The healthcare world is constantly pushing forward with new treatments, greater technology and better practices, why not make the human connection the best it can be with PPE that supports these encounters and the patient's experience.





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