

How do you listen to patients?

Wisdom is the reward you get for a lifetime of listening when you'd have preferred to talk.

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*General Practice 'has a unique consultation process, which establishes a relationship over time, through effective communication between doctor and patient'.*

*From the European Definition of General Practice/Family Medicine*

The essence of the consultation is to provide the cues for yourself and the patient.

1. Welcome the patient

Ask: How are you? What can I do for you today?

Let the patient speak without interruption for the 90 seconds it takes to tell the story

2. Clarify the problem

Ask how does this affect you? At work, at home, at school? Find out why it's a problem

3. Check for worries and expectations

Ask: What worried you? What did you think this was? What did you want me to do?

4. Take a history, exclude serious illnesses.

5. Examine the patient

Explain what you are doing and why you are doing it.

6. Formulate a plan

Say: Having examined you I think it is ..... and there are some choices about what we do next.

7. Predict what should happen next.

This is what I think will happen next. This is what you should do next.

8. Have a backup plan

If this does not go as predicted this is what you should do.

Finally how do you know if the consultation has gone on too long, the patient starts checking the time.