

# Telephone Triage – Step Two

## Building & Maintaining Rapport



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# Who are we?

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# Five Steps to Successful Telephone Triage & Consulting

- 1. Prepare and Plan
- **2. Build and maintain rapport**
- 3. Assess clinical problem and risks
- 4. Make diagnosis, agree actions
- 5. Safety net, document, self care

Rapport equals trust plus comfort.

Neil Strauss

## Investing some energy into building & maintaining rapport ...

1. Reduces caller anxiety
2. Facilitates difficult conversations

And

3. In the unlikely event there is a poor outcome following your call – patients may remember that at the time you took an interest in them, tried your best and were helpful



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- Some perceive it takes longer
- Can create the impression we are prepared to give patients what they **want** rather than what we feel they **need**
- Can be exhausting / contribute to burn out



# “Against Empathy” (Bloom, 2016)

- Puts the case for “Rational Compassion” rather than empathy
  - Don’t confuse empathy with pity / sympathy / compassion
  - A certain amount of emotional empathy is OK, but more constructive is (trained) cognitive empathy
  - When empathy triggers helpful & thoughtful actions we have compassion = “intelligent kindness”
- Thompson, 2018



# Rapport – First Impressions

1. A clear introduction can reduce anxiety and reassure them that they are using a helpful service.
2. If caller expectation is made explicit early on then acknowledge and make commitment to it which can then be revisited
3. Use record of past contacts or other info to demonstrate a degree of longitudinal care
4. Golden (half) minute then balance open and closed questions
5. Make an early empathic statement.

# Think of early empathic statements you might use while talking to ..

- The parent who has been up all night with a child with earache
- 18yo student with a cough for 6 weeks
- 24yo woman bleeding pv 9 weeks into her 1<sup>st</sup> pregnancy
- 28yo teacher who cant swallow having been on penicillin 2 days for tonsillitis
- 79yo lady with severe vertigo for 6 hours
- The son who gave up waiting for a call from you and is now in A&E with his father
- The palliative 80yo unable to pass urine with distended tummy
- The son whose father has just died (expected)

# Rapport – Keeping it Up

1. Don't repeat a question the patient has already answered
2. Respond to cues and recycle information
3. If there is some common ground – try to engage with it
4. Monitor level of rapport and take action if deteriorating - repair misunderstandings or false starts
5. Stress benefits to the patient rather than problems to the service
6. Address concerns and expectations of family and carers as well as patient's (ICE – but don't interrogate)



# So For Example

- 79yo Mr Warbuton “concerned about ongoing rash”
- How would you start the call?
- What phrases do you use to elicit ICE?
  - and what reactions have you had to these questions when used before?

# ICE

- “What were your thoughts on what might be causing the rash?”
- “This sounds like an allergic reaction to me – were you worried it was anything else?”
- “Or were you worried it was anything more serious potentially?”
- “What was it that prompted you to call now?”
- “So what worried you particularly to call now?”
- “Was there anything in particular you hoped we might suggest for this rash?”
- “Or anything else you thought we might need to do about it?”



- Telephone triage call during Covid-19 pandemic
- Ongoing rash for last 10 days, actually not quite so intense but worried as seems to be spreading close to his stoma
- Says it looks like nettle rash, more confluent today, itchy ++
- Feels well in himself, no fever
- Has used hydromol which has helped a lot
- Sounds urticarial
- Can apply calamine / take anti-histamine, should settle but to call if any new symptoms, further concerns or if fails to improve

# Rapport – Wrapping Up

1. Ensure caller appreciates your service access and hours
2. Emphasise that your record will inform any future contacts with the service
3. Consider following up progress later
4. Be honest about what you can / cannot do for them
5. Keep your energy levels up right until the end of the call  
– smiling makes you sound more helpful 😊

# In Summary

1. Invest energy into creating rapport – but limit emotional empathy (use cognitive empathy / rational compassion)
2. Think what you want your first impressions to say about you
3. Consider how you will monitor / maintain rapport to the end of the call
4. Develop ways of eliciting ICE that work for you



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**This is Wilson. He is now  
working from home 😊**



The  
End